

A RECTILINEAR PROPAGATION OF THOUGHT

HEBA Y. AMIN

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SEPTEMBER 15 – NOVEMBER 2, 2018

Heba Y. Amin: A Rectilinear Propagation of Thought

| Lotte Laub

One stops short at the title *A Rectilinear Propagation of Thought*. There would be no such hesitation if it read *A Rectilinear Propagation of Light*; the title would then be consistent with the well-known physical theorem that light travels in a straight line. Angles of refraction can be observed in the propagation of light across media of different densities. Based on these observations are the laws of optics that Arab scholars have handed down to us from antiquity. But “the rectilinear propagation of thought”? Here, a new connection is established. Light has been associated metaphorically with thinking or reason since before the age of Enlightenment. Take, for example, such phrases as “to see something in a different light,” “I see the light,” a lecture is “enlightening.” But how can we make sense of the title of Heba Y. Amin’s current exhibition at Zilberman Gallery Berlin in the light of her works?

We are looking at three iron wall sculptures made between 2016 and 2018, among them the eponymous work, *A Rectilinear Propagation of Thought* (2018). These works represent optical schemes similar to those illustrated by 11th-century Arab scholar Ibn al-Haytham in his *Kitab al-manazir* (*The Book of Optics*). Their shadows, thrown on the wall, make it possible to study the properties of light. This exhibition highlights the correlation between the medium of perception and knowledge, both formally associated with circles: lenses—whether of the eye, in a telescope, camera, slide viewer, or theodolite—are round, just as planets, moons, and lunar craters are. Amin’s *al-Bakri, Moon Crater* (2018), for example, is an image of a lunar crater named after the Andalusian geographer al-Bakri (1010–1094) and can be seen through an antique illuminated slide viewer. A related document reveals a partial alphabetical list of lunar craters named after important personalities and famous researchers from different eras, including al-Bakri. The work addresses the ways in which tradition has taken over space and time: using modern telescopes, 20th century scientists (1976) discovered a lunar crater which they named after the 11th century geographer. al-Bakri’s memory is permanently etched into cartographies of the moon and the lunar geography itself.

In the immediate vicinity of this work, a slightly blurred video titled *Bodies in Movement I* (35 sec, 2018) is projected from above onto a ground-level pedestal; we are watching the scene from a bird’s-eye view. It has been filmed through a theodolite, hence its circular form. We see a boat with black bodies crossing the picture plane in a straight line, from right to left; but what we interpret depends on the optical instrument and its embedded narratives. Is it an innocent image of Africans on a boat? Or migrants attempting to cross the dangerous waters of the sea? Thinking is contingent on perception, but perception



is also contingent on the thinking, and is influenced by knowledge, expectations, interests, and emotions. Thinking does not only modulate what viewers perceive but also transforms subjects into objects subordinated to the viewers' interpretive power.

This process can be studied in the work *The Earth is an Imperfect Ellipsoid*. Heba Y. Amin here refers to the *Kitab al masalik wa-l-mamalik* (*The Book of Roads and Kingdoms*) by al-Bakri. It offers the first comprehensive description of West Africa under the Islamic Empire. The text contains geographic descriptions with embedded ethnographic observations, especially sexualized representations of the female body, which travelers and traders imparted to al-Bakri as he never left Andalusia himself. In 2014, Heba Y. Amin set out on a road trip tracing the footsteps of these 11th-century travelers, a path which coincides with paths of migration today. Amin not only studied al-Bakri to understand her role in the journey, but also to lend a historical dimension to it. The travelers' stories from the 11th century evince a power gap between the observers and those observed. Heba Y. Amin, on her journey, assumed the role of the voyeur, following in the footsteps of traders; she took pictures with a theodolite, a device used by the colonial powers for the survey—and grabbing—of land. At the same time, she plays the role of the surveilled traveler, exploring the possibilities of resistance vis-à-vis the controlling bodies through secretly recorded interactions with border patrol officers. A conversation about this project between Heba Y. Amin and American artist



al-Bakri, *Moon Crater*, 2018

Jill Magid, intended specifically for the catalog of her exhibition at Zilberman Gallery, has itself become part of this research. As becomes clear from this talk, both artists are interested in intersections between bureaucracy and privacy, in possibilities of role-sharing between supervisors and those supervised, in playing off gender differences and undermining demonstrations of power.

A new work from 2018, *Light is not of Divine Origin*, is an installation with slide projectors and old wooden tripods; it examines the early history of photography, particularly the first daguerreotype picture taken on the African continent, which is said to have been made in Egypt. It portrays the building of Muhammad Ali Pasha's palace harem, if only from the outside, and allegedly sparked the imagination of Parisians: "It created a sensation in Paris by igniting fantasies about what the French envisioned as a suggestive subject matter," says Amin. Two further photographs from 2018, in the *Portrait with Theodolite* series, show the artist with optical instruments. All these works are about perception, instruments of observation and their influence on both the observers and those being watched. Heba Y. Amin reflects her twofold role in her work: as an artist who explores her role in relation to the devices used to observe, and whose work, in turn initiates questions about what is being seen. Visitors of this exhibition, too, will experience this double role—as part of a system that is dominating and being-dominated by perception.



Bodies in Movement I, 2018
Video, B/W, 35 sec



The Earth is an Imperfect Ellipsoid, 2016
B/W pigment print on metallic silver 300
archival paper, each 20.5 x 20.5 cm

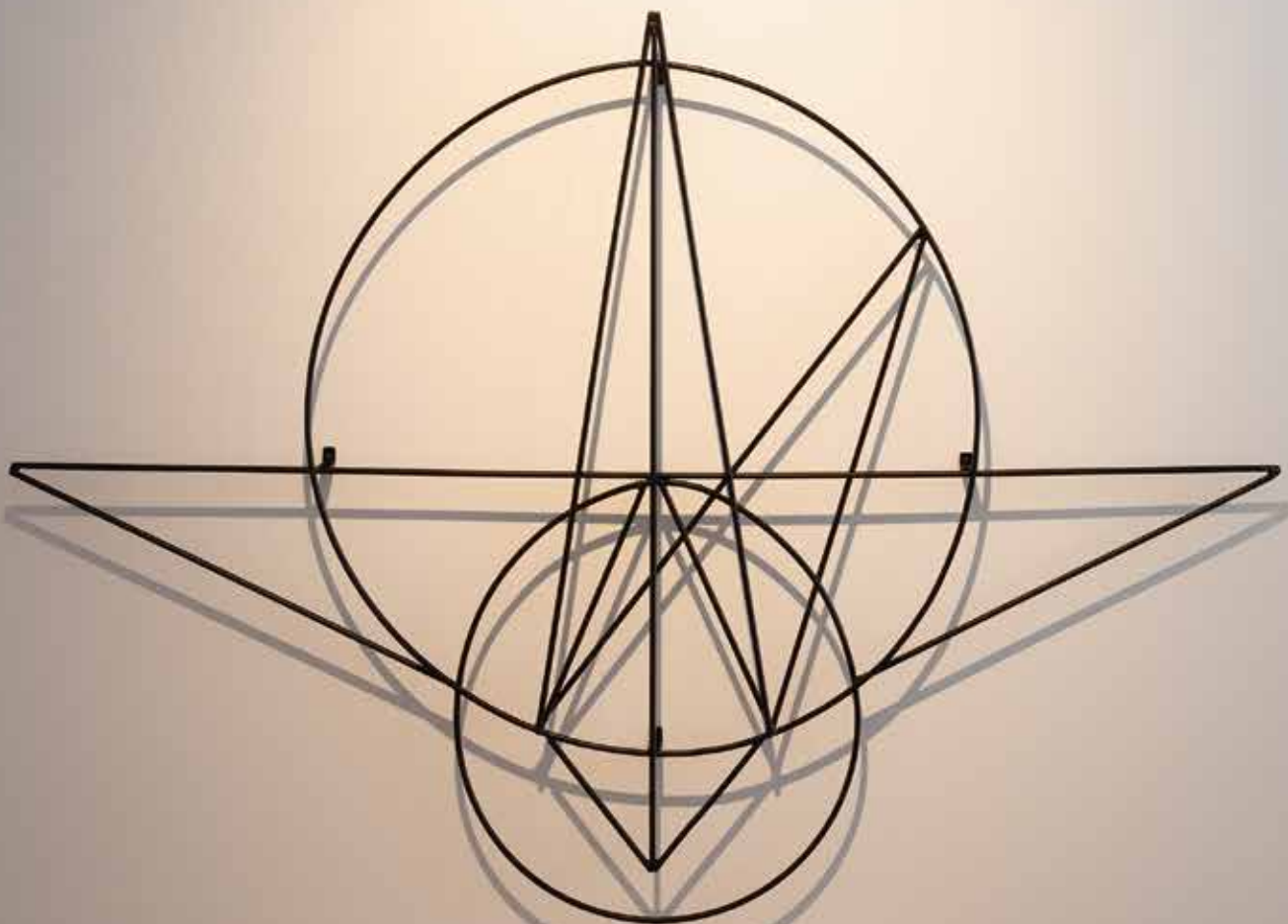




Portrait with Theodolite I, 2018
archival pigment print
80 x 60 cm

Portrait with Theodolite II, 2018
archival pigment print
80 x 60 cm





A Rectilinear Propagation of Thought, 2018
Iron Sculpture, 142 x 197 x 8 cm





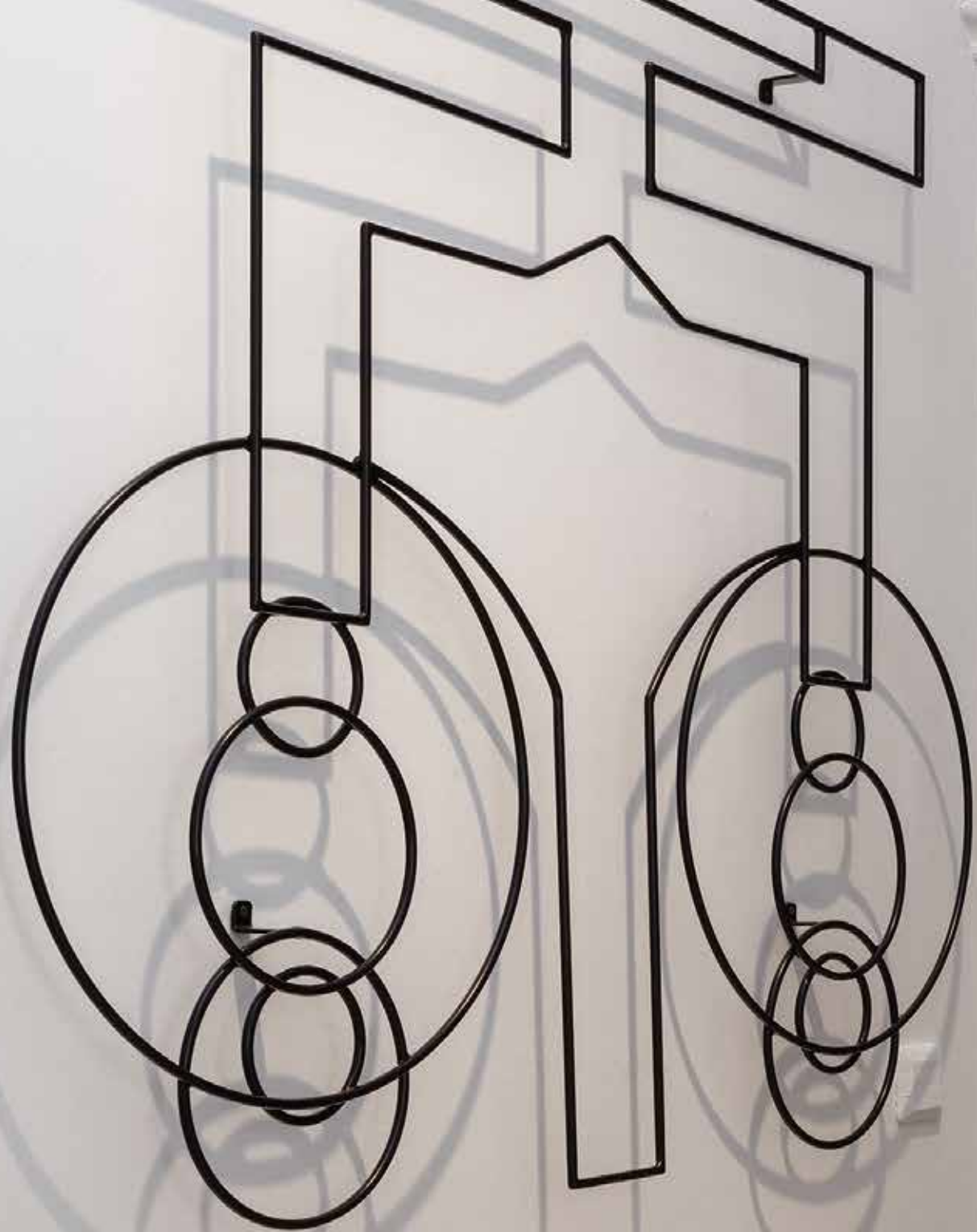
Lunar Crater Data Table											
Crater Name	Lat	Long	Depth (km)	Area (km²)	Volume (km³)	Age (Ma)	Notes	Crater Name	Lat	Long	Depth (km)
Crater A	10.5	15.2	0.5	1.2	0.1	1.2	Small crater	Crater B	25.1	30.8	0.8
Crater B	15.2	20.1	0.7	1.5	0.2	1.5	Medium crater	Crater C	30.8	35.4	1.0
Crater C	20.1	25.1	0.9	1.8	0.3	1.8	Large crater	Crater D	35.4	40.1	1.2
Crater D	25.1	30.8	1.1	2.0	0.4	2.0	Very large crater	Crater E	40.1	45.2	1.5
Crater E	30.8	35.4	1.3	2.2	0.5	2.2	Extinct crater	Crater F	45.2	50.1	1.8
Crater F	35.4	40.1	1.5	2.5	0.6	2.5	Active crater	Crater G	50.1	55.2	2.0
Crater G	40.1	45.2	1.7	2.8	0.7	2.8	Deep crater	Crater H	55.2	60.1	2.2
Crater H	45.2	50.1	1.9	3.0	0.8	3.0	Shallow crater	Crater I	60.1	65.2	2.5
Crater I	50.1	55.2	2.1	3.2	0.9	3.2	Wide crater	Crater J	65.2	70.1	2.8
Crater J	55.2	60.1	2.3	3.5	1.0	3.5	Deep crater	Crater K	70.1	75.2	3.0
Crater K	60.1	65.2	2.5	3.8	1.1	3.8	Shallow crater	Crater L	75.2	80.1	3.2
Crater L	65.2	70.1	2.7	4.0	1.2	4.0	Active crater	Crater M	80.1	85.2	3.5
Crater M	70.1	75.2	2.9	4.2	1.3	4.2	Deep crater	Crater N	85.2	90.1	3.8
Crater N	75.2	80.1	3.1	4.5	1.4	4.5	Shallow crater	Crater O	90.1	95.2	4.0
Crater O	80.1	85.2	3.3	4.8	1.5	4.8	Wide crater	Crater P	95.2	100.1	4.2
Crater P	85.2	90.1	3.5	5.0	1.6	5.0	Deep crater	Crater Q	100.1	105.2	4.5
Crater Q	90.1	95.2	3.7	5.2	1.7	5.2	Shallow crater	Crater R	105.2	110.1	4.8
Crater R	95.2	100.1	3.9	5.5	1.8	5.5	Active crater	Crater S	110.1	115.2	5.0
Crater S	100.1	105.2	4.1	5.8	1.9	5.8	Deep crater	Crater T	115.2	120.1	5.2
Crater T	105.2	110.1	4.3	6.0	2.0	6.0	Shallow crater	Crater U	120.1	125.2	5.5
Crater U	110.1	115.2	4.5	6.2	2.1	6.2	Wide crater	Crater V	125.2	130.1	5.8
Crater V	115.2	120.1	4.7	6.5	2.2	6.5	Deep crater	Crater W	130.1	135.2	6.0
Crater W	120.1	125.2	4.9	6.8	2.3	6.8	Shallow crater	Crater X	135.2	140.1	6.2
Crater X	125.2	130.1	5.1	7.0	2.4	7.0	Active crater	Crater Y	140.1	145.2	6.5
Crater Y	130.1	135.2	5.3	7.2	2.5	7.2	Deep crater	Crater Z	145.2	150.1	6.8
Crater Z	135.2	140.1	5.5	7.5	2.6	7.5	Shallow crater				

Al-Bakri, Moon Crater, 2018
Dia slide, document 29,7 x 21 cm



Bodies in Movement I, 2018
Video projection, B/W, 35 sec





Light is not of Divine Origin, 2018
Dia projections, wooden tripods

their erotic form



The scopic desire of the photographer

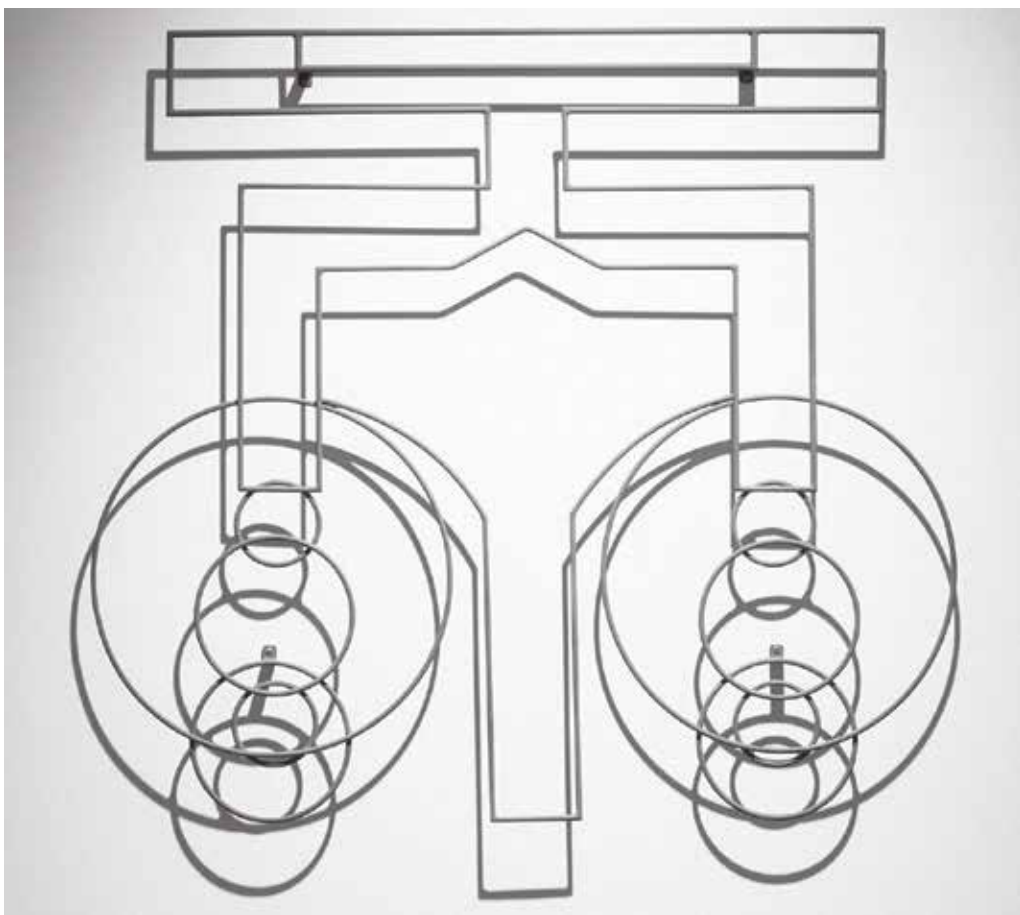




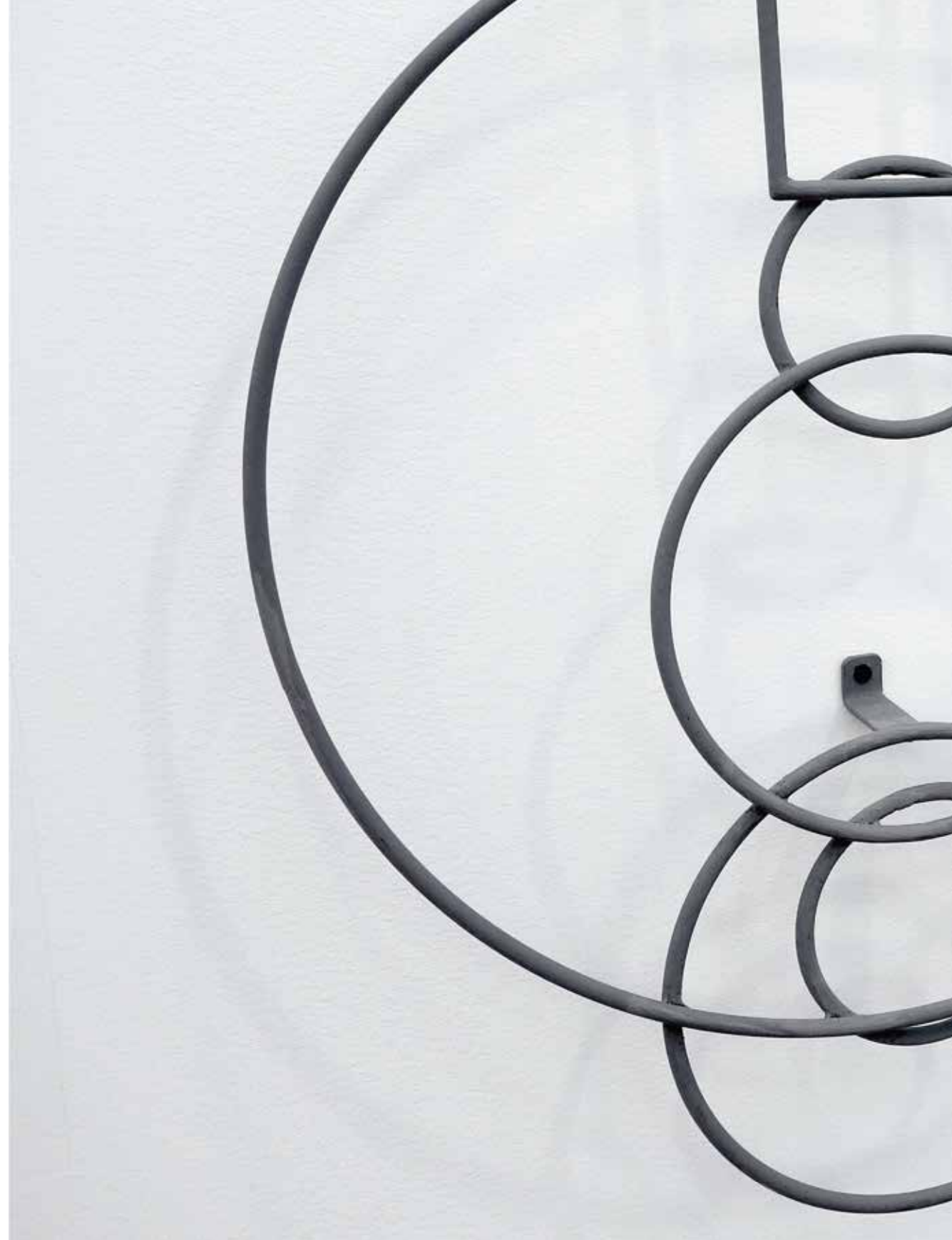
Portrait with Theodolite I, 2018, archival pigment print, 80 x 60 cm

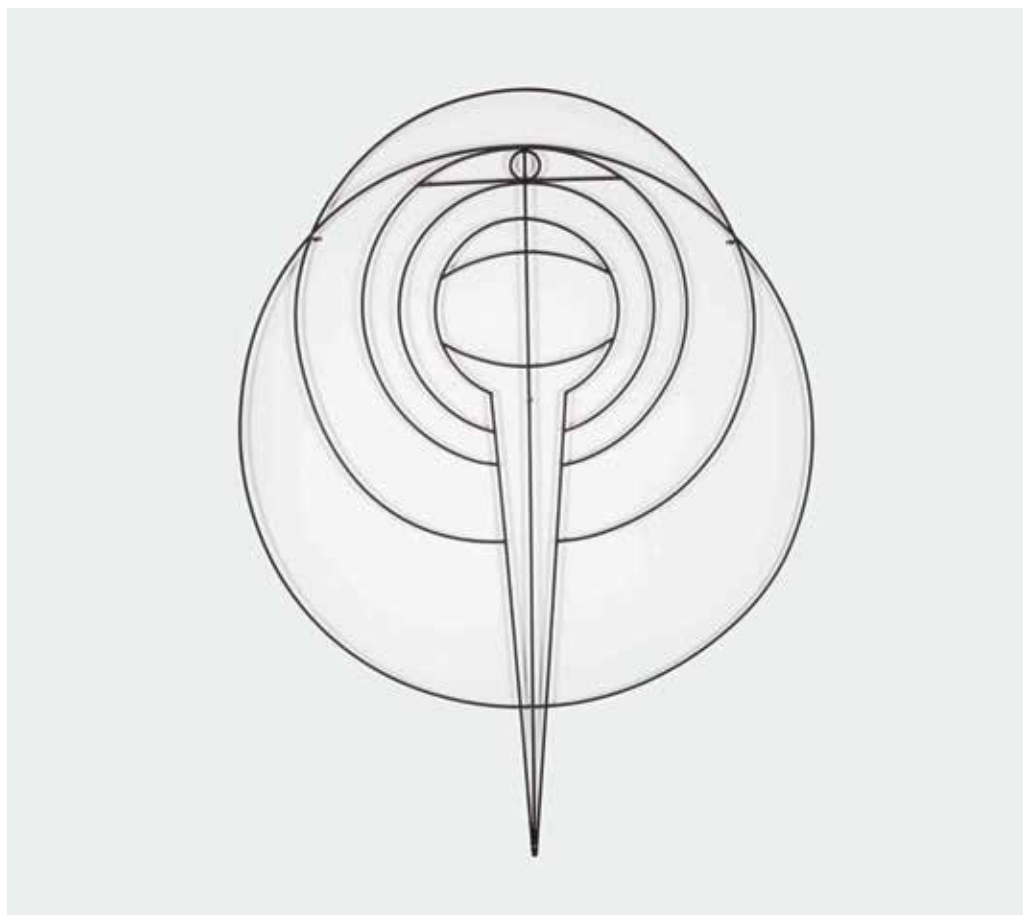


Portrait with Theodolite II, 2018, archival pigment print, 80 x 60 cm

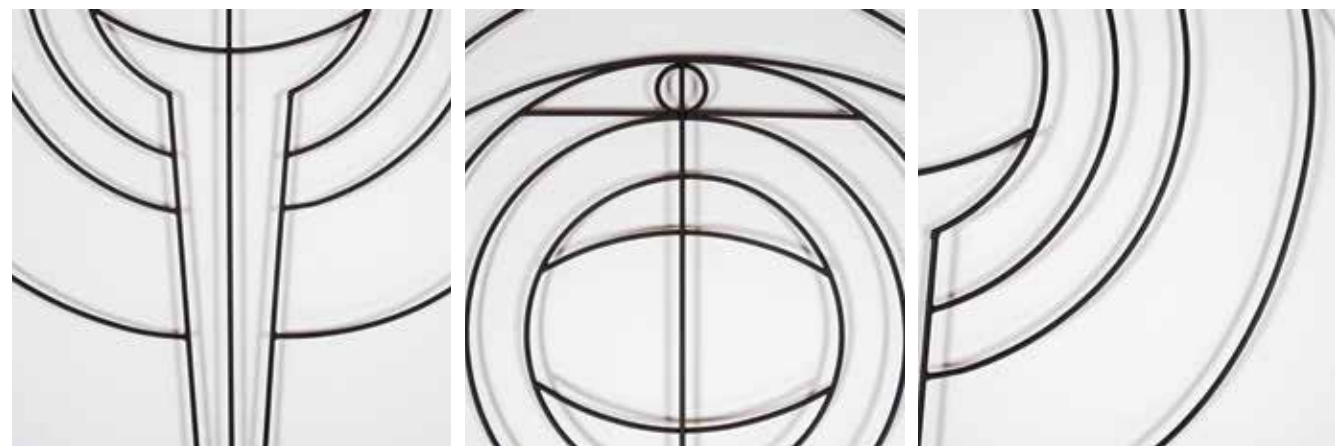


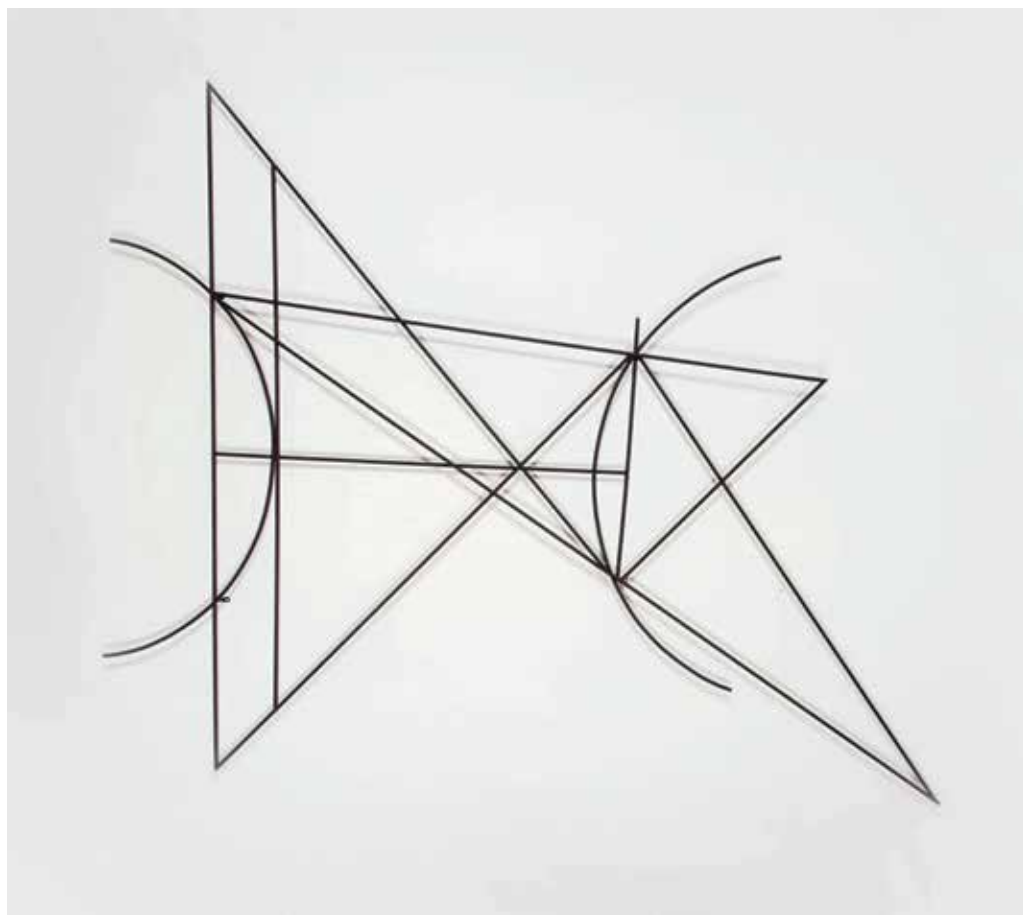
Vision is One of the Senses, 2016
Iron Sculpture, 110 x 120 x 6 cm





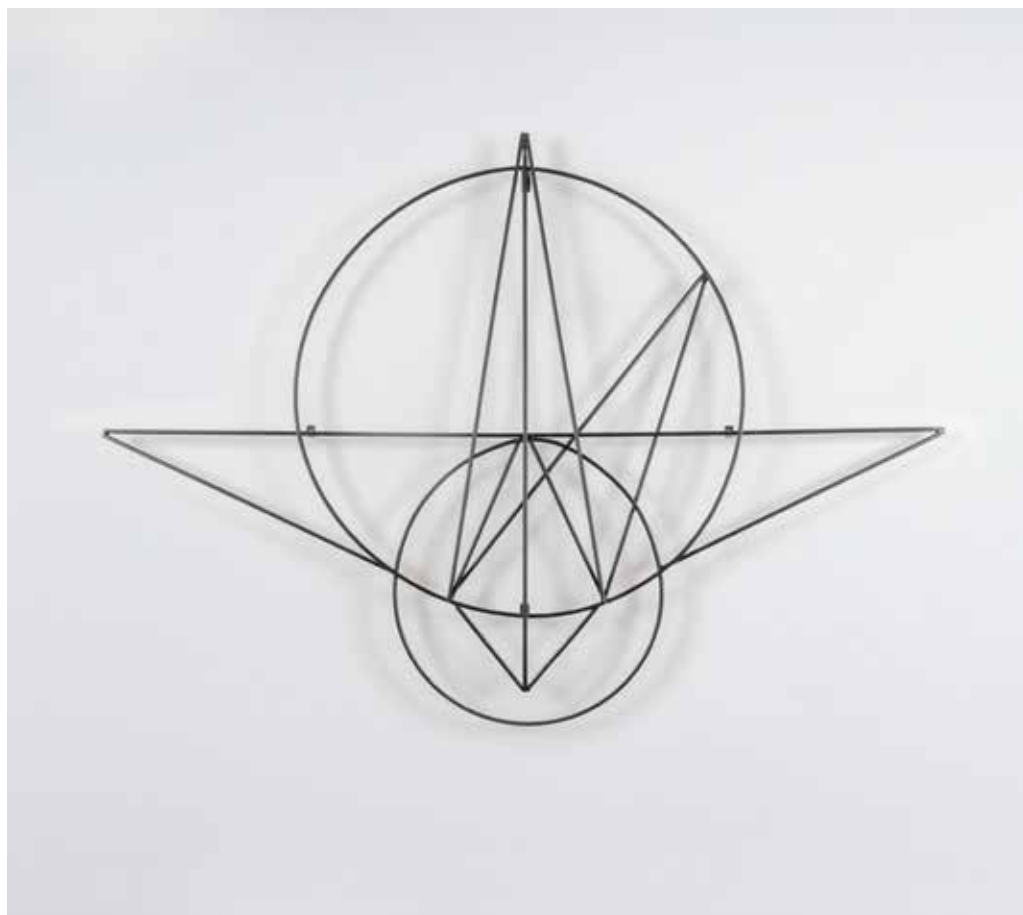
Asfara, 2017
Iron Sculpture, 225 x 200 x 4 cm



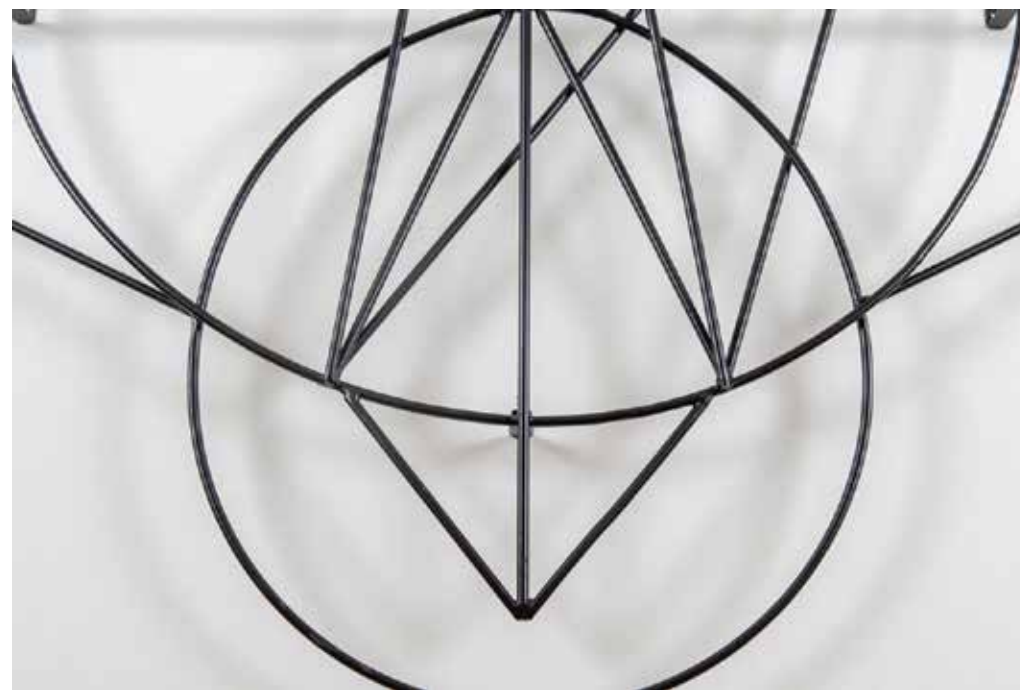


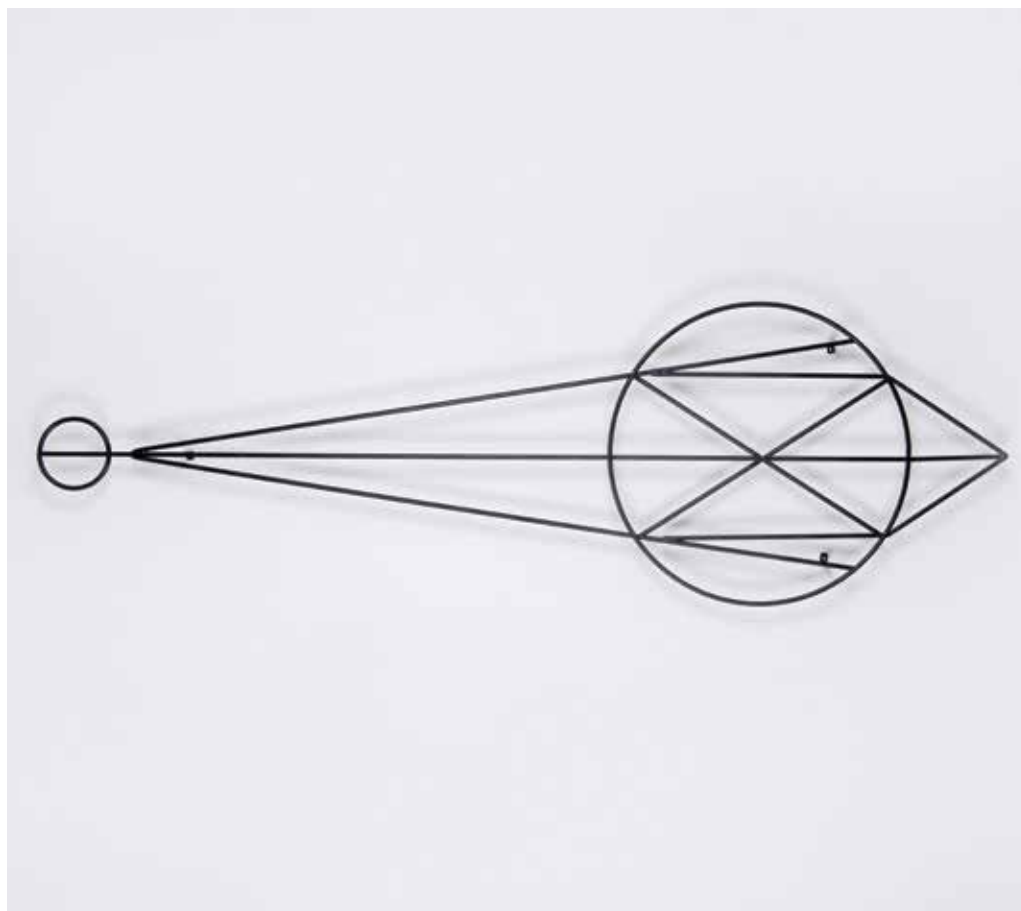
A Mathematical Manner of Perceiving, 2017
Iron Sculpture, 200 x 250 x 4 cm



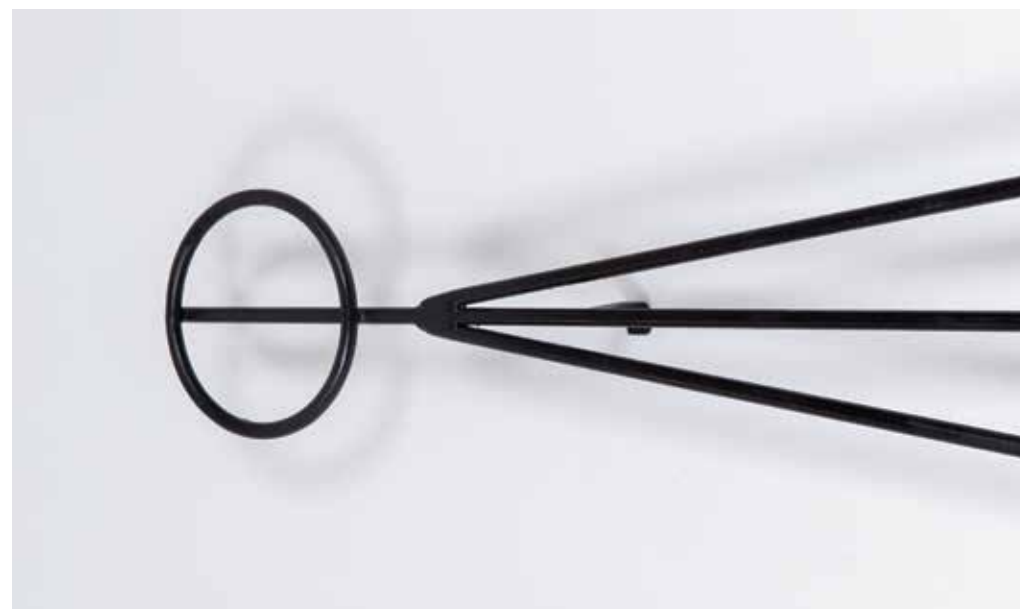
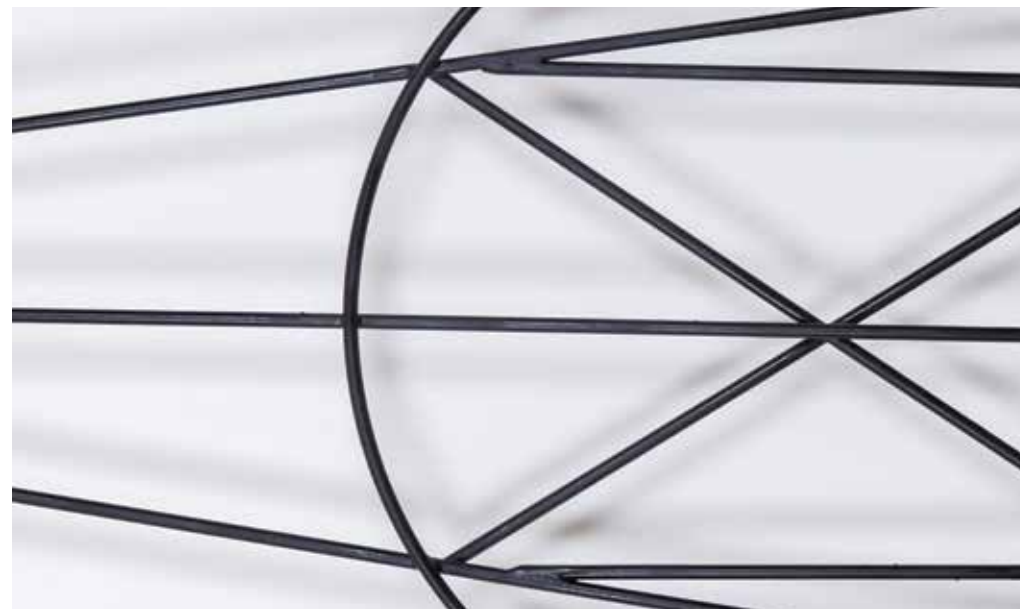


A Rectilinear Propagation of Thought, 2018
Iron Sculpture, 197 x 142 x 8 cm





A Refraction of Histories, 2018
Iron Sculpture, 200 x 65 x 6 cm



Light is not of Divine Origin | Heba Y. Amin

“We have been daguerreotyping like lions.” Horace Vernet

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 photo was taken in Alexandria by French painter Horace Vernet, along with his nephew Frédéric Goupil-Fesque, who captured the exterior of Muhammad Ali Pasha’s palace harem. Even though there was nothing erotic about the image, it became a sensation in Paris by igniting fantasies about what French viewers envisioned as a suggestive subject matter.

The story of the daguerreotype on the African continent entails an erotic fantasy embedded in the colonial imagination. 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. “The occupier was bent on unveiling Algeria,”¹ says Frantz Fanon of the French photographers in Algeria. North African women became the focus of the European fantasy, subject to a degrading stereotyping of women’s bodies. Their image, constructed by the dreamscapes of orientalist painting, was a tool of political propaganda for the colonial project. Sexualized representations of women came to represent the domination of territory; their exploited bodies merged with the idea of claiming land.

Vernet and his nephew were proponents of the “civilizing mission,” the European rationale that supported racist ideals about white superiority and colonization. Becoming “civilized” was to renounce native traditions and yet, ironically, as Europeans rushed to capture the ancient architectural marvels in Africa on film, they perceived themselves as exceptionally cultured. Vernet and Goupil-Fesque documented their travels extensively through both photography and writing; they were “glad to think that, under the growing influence of French civilization, the region’s slumbering reason will be awakened.”² Photography in Africa was utilized as a tool to visualize the vast scale of territory ‘available’ for occupation. Depicting the land as a vast open territory was intended to

¹ Frantz Fanon, “Algeria Unveiled,” in: *Decolonization. Perspectives from Now and Then*, ed. Prasenjit Duara (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 55.

² Frédéric Goupil-Fesquet, *Voyage d’Horace Vernet en Orient* (Bruxelles: C. Muquardt, 1844), 21.

act upon the colonial desire for the openness of ‘primitive’ African landscapes where a new aesthetic of fantasy geographies was at the core of visualizing the colonial project.³

Alongside the vast landscapes depicted in the colonial imagery, are the women who have, for centuries, been subjugated in relation to the conquering of territory. In al-Bakri’s *Kitab al masalik wa-l-mamalik* from the 11th century, merchants and traders convey sexual descriptions of the women they encounter in West Africa as part of the descriptions of geographies traveled, their voyeurism mediated through technologies of measurement and observation that deem it ‘science’. Albrecht Dürer’s *Draughtsman Drawing a Recumbent Woman* illustrates the conquering of bodies and space by utilizing a mathematical method: the grid, a device used to transform human figures into subjects. Here, the artist is positioned in a dominant role over both the subject and the space; the grid becomes a tool of power that puts into question the sovereignty of the body, and, in turn, establishes control over its mobility. “The grid transforms imperceptible bodies and subjectivities into subjects; it classifies subjects into groups, groups into a territory.”⁴ The woman’s body is scrutinized through a Cartesian coordinate system, not unlike the surveying and mapping of land.

What interests me about Vernet’s photograph of the Pasha’s harem is that while these hierarchical relations are in place, the bodies themselves are invisible. The harem is not actually pictured, but the idea of the women is implied through the voyeuristic gaze of the technological device. Even Vernet alludes to the predatory manner of his photographic excursions, particularly in Egypt: they were “daguerreotyping like lions.”⁵ Vernet attempts to capture something intimate, something Europeans didn’t have



³ Michael Bollig and Olaf Bubenzer, eds. *African Landscapes. Interdisciplinary Approaches* (New York: Springer, 2009), 316.

⁴ Dimitris Papadopoulos, Niamh Stephenson and Vassilis Tsianos, *Escape Routes. Control and Subversion in the 21st Century* (Pluto Press: London, 2008), 10.

⁵ “Nous avons daguerréotipifié comme des lions et vous recevrez une partie de ce que nous avons fait comme échantillon.” Letter of 21st November 1839, Paris Archives des Musées nationaux, P30.

access to. The viewer is prompted to look through the windows of the palace to see if, they too, can sneak a glimpse of the secret harem. It is not surprising that this would be his first image; as one of the most prominent orientalist painters, Vernet had been fantasizing about these women for years. So, it came to be, that the first image on the African continent was taken to fulfill a sexual fantasy; instead we are presented with an Ottoman building, a stand-in for the masculine imaginary. The women are not only implied in the image, they are the landscape itself.

the scopic desire of the photographer

the unknowability of the female subject

a hallucination

a deployment of phantasms

of representing bodies

their erotic form

mechanics of the colonial imagination

creating visual systems

to harness the body's mobility

expanding the visual lexicon

of domination and order



through systems of surveillance

the invasive gaze

to control space

to occupy territories

to regulate the technologies of the body

**to confront the machine of
transnational sovereignty**

to cross borders

to grant entrance as an act of intimacy

the quiet affection of power structures

the regime of desire

the state, the pervert

to manipulate through observation

to operate tools that rewrite history

to restructure polity

light is not of divine origin

Interior Landscapes: The Earth is an Imperfect Ellipsoid Project of Heba Amin | William Kherbek

Heba Y. Amin's work, *The Earth is an Imperfect Ellipsoid*, is conceived as a response to the manuscript known as *The Book of Roads and Kingdoms* by the 11th century Andalusian writer, Abu Abdullah al-Bakri. The text presents al-Bakri's interpretation of the writings and observations of others—for example, travelers and traders—concerning the physical and cultural geography of the areas that comprise Western and Northwestern Africa today. Al-Bakri's work shares the Ancient Greek writer, Herodotus's, flair for the spectacular and anecdotal; nevertheless, later scholars have pronounced al-Bakri's geographical data broadly sound. This is remarkable not only given that al-Bakri was relying on other sources, including Abraham ben Jacob and Muhammad ibn Yusuf al-Warraq for his anecdotes, but also the fact that al-Bakri himself appears never to have set foot in Africa, or even outside of his native Andalus, during his lifetime. Thus, al-Bakri could be thought of as an early expression of the all-too-contemporary phenomenon of representing Africa at a remove. Where distance may offer perspective, it may also manifest a species of blindness. Amin's works do not reject this ambiguous positioning.

Instead, that instability, boundedness, and subjectivism become the starting points for her own work. She rejects the notion of a sovereign, neutral observer and seeks what is obscured by the very presence of historical accounts like that of al-Bakri and his sources.

The world as seen, however, is scarcely less unstable as the world seen in the mind's eye. Thinkers from Descartes onward in the modern era would stress the unreliability of mere observation. Amin explores the deceptive dimensions of visibility in a number of works which consider vision, and the psychology of vision, as subject matter. The world as it is seen by the eye is only made possible and intelligible via the translation of the brain, and, thus, visual artefacts bear traces of the mental faculties they seek to address; the powers, and failings, of organs of reception necessarily are inscribed in the artefacts on which they focus. Amin's works often explicitly address this obvious but obscure truth, as well as the centrality of vision and visibility to the formation and consolidation of knowledge and power. Vision is, of course, as much a function of the brain as of the eyes, and what one sees physically is not always what one processes, understands or accepts mentally. A case in point is Amin's iron sculpture *Vision is One of the Senses*. The piece's name is derived from a diagram of the human optical system as understood by the 11th century writer Ibn al-Haytham. Al-Haytham and other Arabic scientists of the middle ages, for example, al-Kindi, were interested in what makes the visible visible. Is it a matter of stellar rays? Is it a matter of projections colliding with each other? The impulse to know, but, importantly, also to seek material causes for the phenomena of the material world,



The Earth is an Imperfect Ellipsoid, 2016
B/W Pigment Print on Metallic Silver 300
Archival Paper, Each 20.5 x 20.5 cm

are important undercurrents in this work as well. First encountering *Vision is One of the Senses*, the viewer may be struck by its almost spiritual quality, in the delicate constancy of its lacework of lines and curves which seem to turn back on themselves like an extended Möbius strip, infinite, but also bounded, rather like the minds that receive the visual data of the senses. The sculpture is an expression, even a kind of celebration of the frontiers of Islamic science in its pre-colonial era. Regimes pass, rulers are subsumed, but commerce and human nature always seem to remain: humans want to understand, and in understanding, one “knows”. In “knowing” one may act.

The question of the act of seeing is another fundamental concern of Amin’s works. The capacity to see with the eye is a kind of starting point, indeed, in another work, *The Pupil of the Mosquito’s Eye*, the media through which we look at the world, and worlds that have vanished, is foregrounded. In the work, a set of four television screens are positioned beside each other showing the black and white image of a woman’s face from apparently decades-old footage as she struggles with gale force winds. Occasionally, she slips out of focus, or she is obscured by the image of a passing man, or she simply turns her face away and becomes both present and absent. She may be more or less identifiable at different moments of the film’s four-and-a-half minutes, but she is eternally visible thanks to the technology that captures her, trapped and immortalised at once. To see this abstraction of a moment in the past, removed from context, an air of nostalgia is quickly subsumed in a sense of unease: who is the person the viewer sees? She, the anonymous protagonist—who turns out to be the artist herself, should one care to do an image search—knows she is being looked at by the camera operator, but now that the footage has entered an entirely different network of exchange and significance, her meaning as an individual fundamentally changes. The work is certainly evocative, but in the contemporary moment, populated by data-sets promising omniscience and imperial global powers invading the airspace of other states with drones—often without permission or even announcing the fact—one cannot help but work backward to find the power structures at the heart of something as seemingly simple as a device for preserving personal memories. The video camera was born in the sin of empire as much as the drone was. This is true also of other transitional and precursor technologies.

In considering this fact, one may return to *The Book of Roads and Kingdoms* and the work Amin produced in direct response to that. In 2014 the artist travelled part of the route described by al-Bakri. Along the way, she produced a number of atmospheric images by the use of the surveying tool known as a theodolite. The gauzy chiaroscuro of the images Amin has produced lends them an almost timeless quality, but the subject matter which she captures, lonely wind turbines stationed in the desert, a nest of satellite dishes perched on squat urban rooftops, are unmistakably contemporary. The world documented in al-Bakri has become recognizable to modern viewers by virtue of the same economic forces that drove many of the chroniclers on whose accounts



The Pupil of the Mosquito's Eye, 2016
4-channel video installation, 4.19 min

of the region al-Bakri's book is based. The theodolite as well is a tool that underwrote conquest and domination; it is inscribed with the same imperial cultural appurtenances as maps of newly "discovered" territories or the drones of today. The question of whether a tool designed within a matrix of power dynamics can be used as a means of liberation is a thorny one, one may think of the prominent role of weapons on the post-colonial flags of many nations, not least the prominence of the AK-47 assault rifle on the flag of Mozambique. But Amin's works are not as concerned with answering such questions as posing them in the first place. The medium may or may not be the message, but there are messages within the medium as well, and often those messages are as much about regression and inequalities as they are about liberation and the advance of knowledge. This observation is true in other, unfortunate ways as Amin depicts. For example, in *The Earth is an Imperfect Ellipsoid*, she presents excerpts from al-Bakri's text which emphasize lurid descriptions of the bodies, and alleged sexual practices, of the female population of these African trading routes. One of the milder excerpts from the book, translated and included in Amin's exhibition in Berlin, will provide a representative sample:

Abu Rastam al-Nafusi, who is one of the merchants of Awdaghust, informed me that he saw one of these women reclining on her side (as they do most of the time rather than sit on their buttocks) and her child, an infant, played with her, passing under her waist from side to side with her having to draw away from him, at all on account of the ampleness of the lower part of her body and the gracefulness of the waist.¹

What is true of bodies is often true of geographies as the language of the colonial period found in primary sources long after the time of al-Bakri attests. Domination has a lexicon, be such domination structural or physical. In the sense that Amin's work is, in part, a riposte to this kind of exoticization and gourmandizing, such a reclamation of the physical and psychological territory of the region is inherently a political as well as an aesthetic act. One could even regard it as a kind of socio-cultural audit: using the tools of technology and power relations to reveal the presence of subjectivity itself and the hidden universe of control and coercion behind that subjectivity. Thus, the lexicon of domination finds its own table of contents. Amin's works do not seek to provide a definitive genealogy for this lexicon, but they provide crucial clues to the etymologies of the violence from which it emerged.

¹ J.F.P Hopkins and Nehemia Levizion, *Corpus of Early Arabic Sources for West African History* (Markis Wiener Publishers, 2000), 68.



Installation view, Bethanien Berlin
Courtesy David Brandt



13° 53' 2.79" N, 13° 28' 21.83" W
Tambacounda, Senegal



14° 43' 19.9" N, 17° 29' 41.8" W
Dakar, Senegal



unknown coordinates 2
La Aguera, Ras Nouadhibou



unknown coordinates 3
La Aguera, Ras Nouadhibou



20° 52' 35.45" N, 17° 3' 32.08" W
Nouadhibou, Mauritania



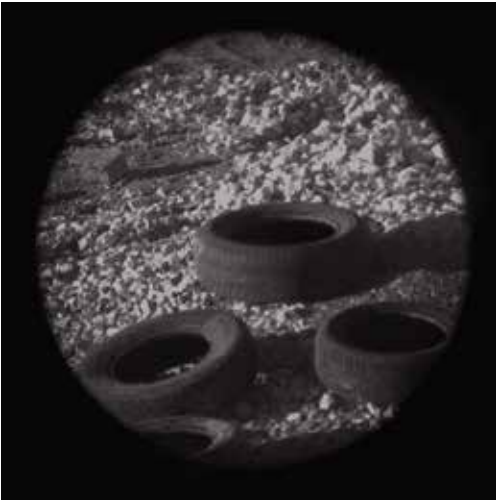
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La Aguera, Ras Nouadhibou



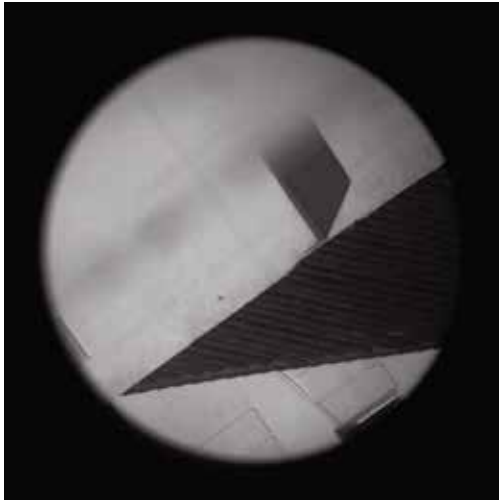
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La Aguera, Ras Nouadhibou



35° 44' 20.41" N, 5° 53' 27.29" W
Boukhalef, Tangier, Morocco



35° 44' 21.14" N, 5° 53' 27.04" W
Boukhalef, Tangier, Morocco



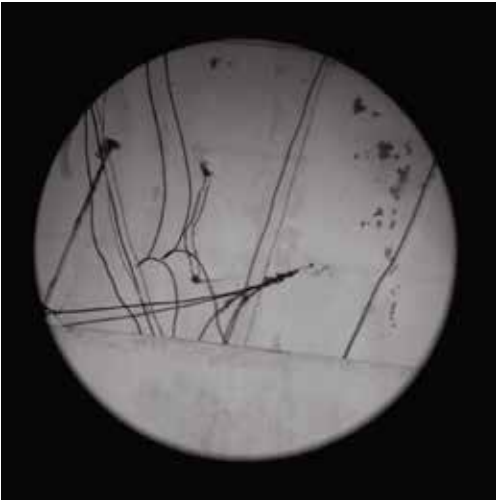
35° 44' 21.08" N, 5° 53' 27.18" W
Boukhalef, Tangier, Morocco



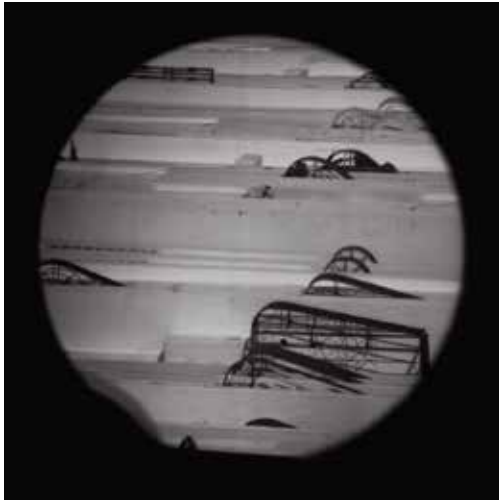
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Boukhalef, Tangier, Morocco



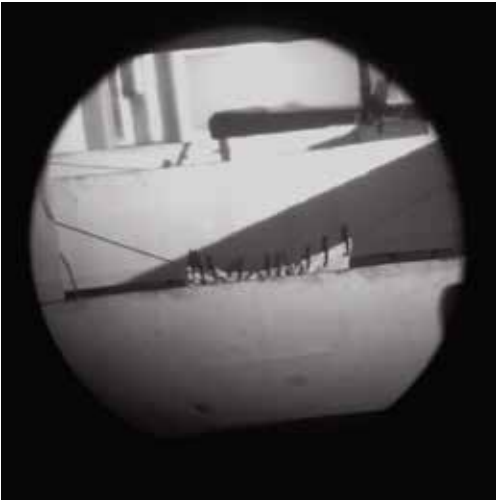
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Boukhalef, Tangier, Morocco



35° 44' 20.82" N, 5° 53' 26.75" W
Boukhalef, Tangier, Morocco



35° 44' 20.5" N, 5° 53' 26.76" W
Boukhalef, Tangier, Morocco



35° 44' 21.01" N, 5° 53' 26.93" W
Boukhalef, Tangier, Morocco



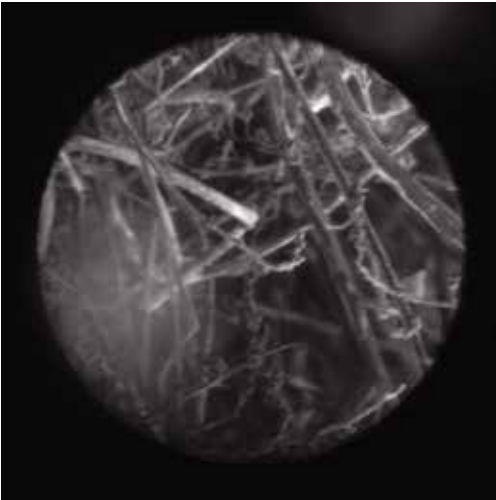
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Boukhalef, Tangier, Morocco



35° 44' 21.16" N, 5° 53' 27.02" W
Boukhalef, Tangier, Morocco



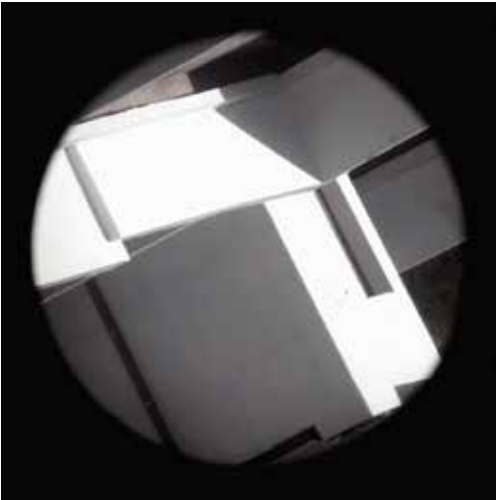
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Boukhalef, Tangier, Morocco



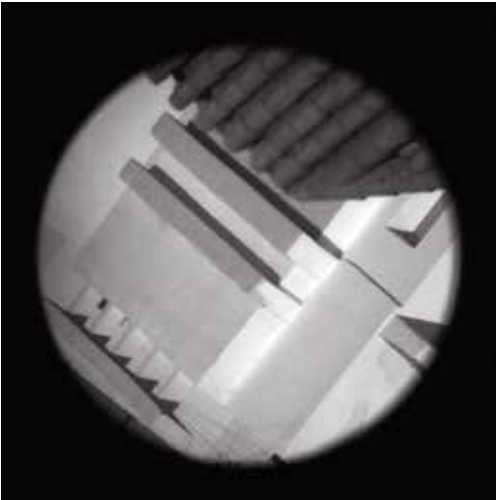
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Tangier, Morocco



35° 47' 27.82" N, 5° 49' 13.66" W
Tangier, Morocco



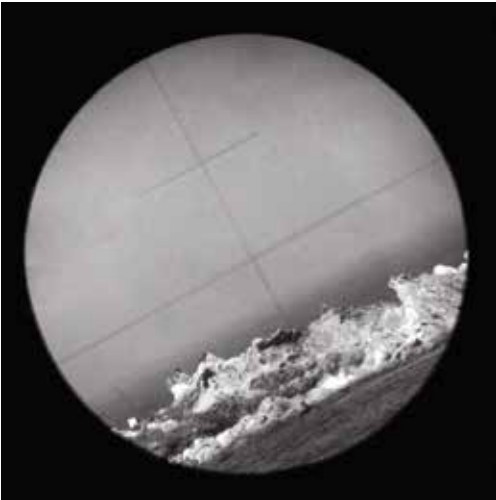
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Boukhalef, Tangier, Morocco



35° 44' 21.16" N, 5° 53' 27.02" W
Boukhalef, Tangier, Morocco



35° 54' 41.4" N, 5° 23' 3.92" W
Ceuta, Spain



35° 54' 41.6" N, 5° 23' 3.95" W
Ceuta, Spain



The Observation Pillar - Nouadhibou, Mauritania, 2016, B/W archival print, 80 x 120 cm

Conversation between Jill Magid and Heba Y. Amin | September 1, 2018

Heba Amin: I think I saw your work *Evidence Locker* the first time in 2007, that's when you had the show at the Gagosian Gallery. And it occurred to me, when I was going back through my notes, that was 10 years ago already. I've been thinking about this project and how certain elements are now drastically different, the landscape of the technologies of surveillance have changed. But the thing that really stood out to me is the language of intimacy you created around these very dry and bureaucratic structures; when I read through your novella, it really stayed with me for a long time, so much so that I was thinking about it when I started my own project ten years later.

In 2014 I took a trip in West Africa, starting in Nigeria and traveling to Europe by road; the project was about borders and migration. But I found the topic very difficult to grapple with and asked myself: who am I to tell this story with these harrowing narratives of people who are experiencing something that I could never begin to understand? When I decided to embark on the journey I first needed to get all my travel documents in order. I'm an Egyptian citizen and I have an Egyptian passport, which basically means I'm relatively immobile, I need to get a visa for every single country that I travel to, and that has to be arranged beforehand. I had to make appointments with all the consulates and attend the interviews (a process that took several months because I had to apply for 12 visas) and there was a consistent dynamic that I was confronted with. The consulate officers were often very flirty with me and, with all my data in hand, were establishing this very uncomfortable and awkward interaction that made me so aware of my lack of agency. This is where I started thinking about your project. It was this idea of "intimacy" in bureaucracy and a questioning around how one could reclaim power in that particular space by flipping the narrative. One of the main questions I have for you and the way you approached your project *Evidence Locker* is regarding whether or not you found that you managed to claim your power in that system by setting up the conditions yourself.

Jill Magid: Yes absolutely. *Evidence Locker* took place in Liverpool which had, at the time, the largest CCTV (closed circuit television) program of its kind. It was run by the Liverpool police and city council. I was then, and am still, interested in the idea of the omniscient eye of the State and its various manifestations. In this case, it was the bird's-eye view (and the recording capabilities) of those CCTV cameras. The more I researched the system, the more I questioned the lack of agency of the citizen caught on



Jill Magid, *Trust* | *Evidence Locker*
Single-channel digital video. 18 min. 2004
Image modified by the Liverpool Police Forensic Imaging Unit
Courtesy the artist, LABOR, Mexico City, and Until Then, Paris

camera. These cameras create a space of performance; their range of vision produces a platform. You typically pass through it, knowingly or unknowingly. It's not a dialogic relationship. You are being watched. Or, most likely, you are not being watched; you're only being recorded. I wondered if there was a way to use the system differently, to look back at it and engage it. That possibility was designed into the system, although no one else had previously used it. If a citizen fills out the proper legal forms—saying who you are, where you were, the time of day and the "incident" that happened—which was not defined, and paid the appropriate fee, the police, by law, had to show you the footage they had of you. I filled out the documents every day for 31 days like letters to a lover. The operators responded by following me closely, eventually giving me access to their control room and themselves. I think this engagement with the system created more than a simple inversion of it. It altered its function. The system became an apparatus, like a film studio, through which I created a diary of my existence in the city. It was also a

vehicle through which to create a relationship with the operators—the policemen—who were otherwise faceless and hidden.

HA: Do you feel like you felt empowered by being in that position of now being able to dictate how that system works for you, as opposed to being the passive victim of it?

JM: Yes. I felt empowered, among many other feelings, but I wouldn't have called myself a victim. Granted I'm a white female, so in Liverpool I was very probably not a targeted person. As a woman, though, I was somewhat targeted, or treated differently. For instance, I made an 18-minute video work with the footage called *Trust*. In it, one of the CCTV officers is leading me through the city via the cameras with my eyes closed. He becomes my eyes. It was very intimate. At the end of it, I open my eyes and we say goodbye to each other. My performance is over, I walk off camera, but the camera, of course, remains on. There is this amazing change when the officer is no longer looking through it. You can feel the camera die, or become disembodied, even though it is still running. Right before the footage cuts out, this tall woman with a tight sweater enters the frame. She's about to go off-camera, when suddenly one of the officers must have seen her and quickly picked up the controlling device and started following her. She unwittingly becomes the object of the gaze through the camera, just moments after our intimate use of it. It's a disturbing moment—whether you want to give that woman the name "victim", I am not sure, but she absolutely becomes a subject that is not in control of her own subjectivity.

HA: I suppose "victim" is maybe too direct of a word. It's very difficult now to get away from the implications that surveillance has. I feel today it has a very different meaning in the post-Edward Snowden landscape. Surveillance footage often has this very specific connotation, and I think what's really interesting about your films is you manage to make them playful. It's really funny at times, and a joy to watch you try to navigate the space with your eyes closed. You're walking in the wrong direction, then you're going to walk into people... it really takes you away from the experience of the violence of surveillance, something I couldn't achieve in my own work. I couldn't find a way to lighten the subject matter, I couldn't find a way to get away from the violence that's inherent in the tools that I'm using. This is why I then decided to put myself in the position of the voyeur to understand what it feels like so that I can better conceptualize it. In the case of my project I am very specifically addressing vulnerable bodies and difficult political situations, and I felt that the only way I could deal with the surveillance was to go behind these surveillance tools myself. I found that I was even more disturbed than I thought I would be. I'm wondering in your case—because you say that you've had conversations hanging out with some of these surveillance officers and you plotted movie scenes together and stuff like that—how complicated their side of it really was as you indicated. You said that they were also uncomfortable. How did they elaborate on that? I'm very curious.



Heba Y. Amin, *Field Work Boukhalef, Tangiers, Morocco*, 2014
Courtesy Dawit L. Petros

JM: I found, early on into the 31-day cycle of the project, that half the officers on that system questioned or were uncomfortable with their newfound gaze. Before being CCTV operators, most if not all of them worked as cops on the streets. They encountered people directly with all their senses, not from a distant, concealed position. They spoke of often misinterpreting people's actions and feeling confused by this. But just to comment on what you just said about the fact that you felt you couldn't escape certain things, from what I understand when you were getting the visas, you were sitting across from the officers. There was no mediating device.

HA: Right, yes. To an extent.

JM: It's a big difference from my relationship with the officers, which was mediated by the cameras. There are different levels of complication once the surveillance device

is removed. We are also talking about, in your case, an extremely different context. I'd done a lot of research on the surveillance apparatus, and what I often found was that there was a lot of information about how the technology worked but little about the people who were to operate it. There was even less information about what exactly they were looking for, or why they were looking for it in this way. I think perhaps the officers felt that. Initially, the officers were confused by my way of approaching the system, saying things like: I am not sure if I am supposed to film you this way or show you the footage. Or why do you want this? I'd continually refer to the system handbook or the law, both publicly accessible. I could provide a good reason why they should continue following me. I was often met with startled looks. Eventually there was a certain moment when they stopped questioning me. Half of the officers in the control room never really participated but a good number did, and at a certain point when we were deep in, we all knew it was getting really weird, and everyone seemed to know that if anyone called it out, it would end. It was kind of this unspoken thing, a complicity, that we came to share. This process is what I refer to as a seduction, which I mean in a Baudrillardian sense. A kind of gaming between players.

HA: I suppose I confront that in a very real way as well because of my experience with getting the visas and the fact that I was being hit on. One consulate officer took extra photos of me and taped it on his computer, another pursued me online and asked me out on a date, he has all my data. And another invited me to a marriage seminar because I'm in my 30s and I'm single. You know things like that made me wonder what it's going to be like actually crossing the border. And it made me really uncomfortable with this idea of intimacy that's embedded in bureaucracy, that crossing a border becomes this intimate act of granting entrance. There's something horrific about that.

JM: I wouldn't use the word "intimate". I think that with the police officers, I found a space of intimacy via the apparatus; the relationship afforded by the cameras became something other, something more than surveillance or counter-surveillance. In the case you are describing, I think those power dynamics—of their authority over your (potential) access—remained intact. I wonder if they behave like that with all women or if they were like that with you in particular because you are young and attractive. I also wonder what your behavior was, like when you went in and they started being flirty, did you stop it right away? Or were you kind of experimenting to see how far these authorities would abuse their power? What was your experience in that position?

HA: Of course, initially it wasn't something I was egging on. And, sure, perhaps there's something in my demeanor that encourages a certain interaction. But when I noticed it being consistent I started to document it during the actual trip. At the border-crossings I started secretly recording the interactions with border patrol officers to get a better understanding of these hierarchies, especially since the spaces I was traveling in are

male-dominated spaces. There are predominantly young men travelling on the migration routes and so I was always outnumbered. I was investigating my own discomfort in spaces that I felt I wasn't supposed to be in and, perhaps through that, exaggerated my behavior.

JM: See, I think the idea of highlighting what is already there is really interesting. When I first started showing *Evidence Locker* and giving artists talks about the project, there was inevitably someone in the audience, always male, who would jump up and say: Do you think the police would have followed you if you were a man? It was always said as if he was catching me out. And I would respond: No. I don't think they would have followed me if I was a man. And I'd add, there wasn't a single female officer on that team. I used this quality of the system to explore it: I wrote the legal documents to access footage as love letters, I stared into the camera, and performed for it. I tapped into the system, aware of the one-way gaze of the surveillance cameras, and who was behind them. I don't think it's possible to exaggerate something that isn't already there. You can't go and drop something foreign into a system because it simply won't be legible to it. So, I can imagine—and I want to make very sure that it didn't seem like I was saying that because you are young and attractive that you are eliciting bad behavior from those officers, or that you are responsible for it—and yet I can imagine they did indeed behave like this. Unfortunately, this is not an unfamiliar dynamic for women in facing male authorities. How then can you respond? Do you attempt to shut it down if you could? Do you risk not getting the visa? Do you ignore it? Or do you study the behavior, which seems to me is what you were doing, and it informed your project. It seems like it was a way for you to study these roles, and how they made you feel. But I don't find it intimate because you're still being fully objectified; there's no agency or subjecthood really happening there.

HA: I suppose a better word would be "sexualized" or "objectified" as opposed to "intimate".

JM: Yes.

HA: I mean from that point I felt like I needed to understand what that gaze feels like; this is where I tried to flip the narrative by becoming the voyeur myself. When I traveled this journey, I used a theodolite which is an engineer's tool but it's also a telescopic device that I was using to photograph. It was a very eerie feeling, I felt guilty about it, because I suddenly became the spy watching people who had no idea I was anywhere in the vicinity. This is also where I was thinking about how CCTV cameras are set up, that you can watch people and they have no idea that you're watching them. But the thing that is even more disturbing about the tool that I chose to use, in addition to its problematic history embedded within colonialism and construction in Africa, is that it also has crosshairs on it. Suddenly I felt like I was setting myself up to act upon the violence and that made me very uncomfortable. I don't know whether that gave me further understanding of what

it's like to be in that position of power or not. It raises this question about my position in this whole thing. I felt like what I was doing was quite problematic, and in a way, I couldn't fully come to grips with it. I wondered about that also in your case. I thought a lot about these interior spaces that you were going into and then describing at length in a—one could say here—*intimate* way. I feel like surveillance is now in those intimate spaces, the differentiation between interior / exterior space is no longer distinct. I wonder how you would think about that differently now than you did then.

JM: Surveillance technology and the awareness of it has changed for sure, but I don't know if police-operated city-wide CCTV is run vastly differently than it was then. Those cameras aren't generally inside of domestic space; that's still illegal, I believe. I could be wrong. I think working with CCTV the way I did, when I did, encompassed a different set of dynamics from what you were facing with the visa officers, and with what you were doing with the theodolite. With the theodolite, you imported your own, autonomous system into the migration path. I was looking into your work before speaking with you, and I was thinking about these devices. It's an old tool, but they still use them to survey the landscape, right?

HA: Yeah, yeah, they do. Just more updated versions.

JM: I'm always really interested when I see people using those because it's often in the middle of a busy, city street as if the world is a map and they're just standing on it and no cars are coming because they're in the act of surveying. I guess one could argue it's a form of surveillance but it has a different use, right?

HA: Definitely. I guess it's not necessarily the surveillance of that system that I'm thinking of.

JM: No, no I didn't think you were. What I found interesting was how you used the device to measure the land, and as a measure of yourself in that landscape. Obviously, we are aware there's a whole long critique and study on the use of maps and their relationship to politics, power, and control. In a talk that you gave that I listened to online you were talking about somebody who said that the way a map is formed is an illustration of who is in power at the time of its making. Or something to that degree.

HA: Right.

JM: I like this idea that you are, very consciously, moving through the landscape while at the same time surveying it through an old tool. I don't know exactly what that leads to, but it brings me to consider your own body in that landscape, and your body in time and history. I think less about the borders, interestingly, and more about the spaces between—which are, of course, partly but strongly defined by them. You were trying to navigate the landscape as someone who is following a migration path but not really

escaping anything. I wondered what your attachment was to those landscapes, if you felt one or if it was the act of surveying the landscape that enabled you to attach to it? What did the theodolite give you? The borders are almost too obvious, for me, in this case. There's something else happening in your temporary occupation or movement through those landscapes that I find myself thinking about more.

HA: Definitely contemplating my position in that space is a really important part of it. What am I doing there? The initial question that I was troubled by was: why am I doing this? I had to find my place in it. I inserted myself through histories that I felt I could position myself in. I was using an Arabic geography text, the first comprehensive description of the geography of West Africa under the Islamic Empire in the 11th century. But what's really interesting about this text is that merchants and travelers and traders are describing the places that they encounter through sexually explicit descriptions of women's bodies, a scientific text which is an objectification of women. That's the part that I became interested in, a narrative that I could engage with. But I also wanted to bring to light somehow the contemporary context of these very troubling and problematic contested spaces. For me, my position in this project was such a burden and I was so aware of it. When I watch your video *Trust*, I wonder how aware you are of your own body in that space and how comfortable or uncomfortable you felt doing that.

JM: I think it's really great that you felt uncomfortable with what you were doing, and grappled with your position, because they're very important questions. I felt this at times when I made *Evidence Locker*, too. The cameras were supposedly meant to fight crime, not to make a visual diary. I continue to face these questions in current projects, as do many other artists and writers I speak with, especially now in the Trump era: Who can tell which story? When you enter a foreign space to experience it, what kind of experience are you having and how can you communicate it? These are some of the questions of our moment. I think one has to be very conscious of his or her own position in each context. To be aware of oneself and to exhibit, or state, this awareness.

HA: I think about how narratives in the media are perpetuated. There are power structures at play, dictating other people's stories. Interestingly, this is something that we seemingly don't question in the same way. How does one negate that narrative as well? In fact, this was one of the main motivations for this journey to begin with: to diversify the contemporary migration narrative as told in the media.

JM: Yes, there need to be more voices, and different voices. It's so delicate because I really don't like the idea that only certain individuals qualify to speak. That's a dangerous position because how's anyone going to ever come to understand anyone else? When you reached out to me, I wanted to be mindful that questions I asked came from an informed place because I have not traveled through many of these countries that you have in your project. I have not walked this migration path; I have not been personally involved in the

politics related to it. But I think your hesitation about your position and your willingness to share this hesitation has a kind of clarity and openness, about who you are, what you were doing, or trying to understand. You forefronted the tools you were using. As you said, you experienced this objectified position personally while trying to get the visas, and then wanted to see if this same relationship in getting the visas manifested itself at the borders where you would use them. I also see you trying to find another kind of anchor into the landscape in this text, referring to an old literary text and then using an old camera. And the theodolite, it's not a violent tool, right? It's the crosshairs that gave you the feeling of the violence. But the crosshairs don't manifest in the photographs, do they?

HA: In some of them they are faint, you can see them.

JM: Oh, that's different. I was wondering if, as you were looking through the devices, you were feeling a sense of violence, if they manifested in the results.

HA: For the most part, the images are quite abstract and I decided also to eliminate the depiction of the human body, except for a few. The viewer sees abstract landscapes and unless you know the narrative that goes along with it I don't think it reads as violent.

JM: It might a little though. The images—I have only seen them online—have the quality of outdated surveillance images. I totally agree with you that when an image has that quality like that there's a particular reading of it. It's layered, no matter what you photograph. I was particularly drawn to the image of the two trees. They felt like a vulnerable couple

HA: I guess to that point—and this is also something I thought a lot about in your project because of the very particular aesthetics of CCTV—the low quality of surveillance footage is often associated with capturing crime. I wonder to what extent you feel like the technology itself is implicated in those narratives. I feel like you managed to transform it and turn it into something else but at the end of the day the aesthetic of the video itself still alludes to very particular contexts that are hard to get away from.

JM: One of the things that first attracted me to surveillance technology was the quality and abstraction of the images. I didn't come to work with surveillance directly, although if you look back at my practice it was always about exploring the social fabric and my position in it as well as questioning power relations and how I, as a citizen, can or cannot participate in them. But what I think first drew me to surveillance cameras were the aesthetics of the image, and the bird's-eye view. There's a banality and a calmness to city-wide surveillance footage. You don't hear anything—the footage is silent, and still you remain aware, or you don't forget, that the camera is watching for crime. There's a kind of dull waiting that feels pregnant. I read this book years ago, I can't remember who wrote it, where the protagonist had recently lost her husband. She became an

insomniac and found that, at night, she could log into different CCTV cameras around the world on her computer. She would lie with them on next to her bed, and they comforted her. I totally get that. There's something about the city being continually recorded that feels emotionally steady. People are inconsequential, emerging quickly through these lenses and then disappearing. Early on I felt these cameras had romantic potential. It's certainly not an intended use of a city-wide surveillance apparatus, but it allows for its subversion. You have a whole film studio set up by the city government, that's working to achieve certain things in which safety is only one of them. There is potential within the system to find and create agency through it. Using the system like this, or just differently, opens all these questions about what the system had been initially designed for, and what it might become.

HA: Interesting. You've initiated this flirtation with the city and achieved a self-permanence in the physical space by obtaining and preserving that footage. It goes back to the 11th-century geography text where women become part of the geography itself, they are written into the description of geography.

William Kherbek is the writer of the novels, *Ecology of Secrets* (Arcadia Missa, 2013) and *ULTRALIFE* (Arcadia Missa, 2016), the epic poem, *Pull Factor* (2016), and the poetry collections, *Ephemera* (2014), *retrodiction* (left gallery, 2016), *26 Ideologies for Aspiring Ideologists* (If A Leaf Falls Press, 2018), and *Everyday Luxuries* (Arcadia Missa, 2018). His journalism has appeared in a number of publications including Block Magazine, Spike, Rhizome.org, Flash Art, AQNB, and Samizdat.

American artist **Jill Magid**'s work is deeply ingrained in her lived experience, exploring and blurring the boundaries between art and life. Through her performance-based practice, Magid has initiated intimate relations with a number of organizations and structures of authority. She explores the emotional, philosophical and legal tensions between the individual and 'protective' institutions, such as intelligence agencies or the police. To work alongside or within large organizations, Magid makes use of institutional quirks, systemic loopholes that allow her to make contact with people 'on the inside'. Her work tends to be characterized by the dynamics of seduction, the resulting narratives often taking the form of a love story. It is typical of Magid's practice that she follows the rules of engagement with an institution to the letter—sometimes to the point of absurdity. Magid has had solo exhibitions at institutions around the world including Museo Universitario Arte Contemporáneo (MUAC), Mexico City; Tate Modern, London; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Berkeley Museum of Art, California; Tate Liverpool; the Stedelijk Museum Bureau Amsterdam; Yvon Lambert, Paris and New York; Gagosian Gallery, New York; and the Security and Intelligence Agency of the Netherlands.

Lotte Laub is Program Manager at Zilberman Gallery–Berlin. She obtained her PhD at the Friedrich Schlegel Graduate School of Literary Studies at the Free University of Berlin with the 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 received a research fellowship from the Orient-Institut Beirut and received an Honours Postdoc Fellowship at the Dahlem Research School of the FU Berlin. She worked previously at the Martin-Gropius-Bau in Berlin.

HEBA Y. AMIN

b. Cairo, Egypt 1980
Lives and works in Berlin, Germany

EDUCATION

- Since 2016 Visiting Faculty, Art, Bard College Berlin, Germany
- Since 2016 Ph.D. Fellow, Freie Universität: Art History, BGSMCS, Berlin, Germany
- 2010-2012 Post-Graduate Certificate, University of Applied Sciences Berlin (HTW): Media Computing, DAAD Grant, Berlin, Germany
- 2005-2009 MFA, University of Minnesota: Interactive Design, New Media Art
- 2004-2005 Post-Baccalaureate Certificate: Painting, Minneapolis College of Art and Design, MN, USA
- 1998-2002 BA Studio Art, Macalester College, St. Paul, MN, USA

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2017 *The Earth is an Imperfect Ellipsoid*, Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin, Germany
- 2017 *An Astronomical Determination of the Distance Between Two Cities*, Gallery Zilberman, Istanbul, Turkey
- 2016 *The Earth is an Imperfect Ellipsoid*, Gallery Zilberman, Istanbul, Turkey
- 2007 *Latitudes*, California Building Gallery, Minneapolis, MN, USA

SELECT GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2018

- Geographies of Imagination*, SAVVY Contemporary, Berlin, Germany
- Kunstpreis der Böttcherstrasse*, (shortlisted) – Kunsthalle Bremen, Germany
- African Metropolis*, MAXXI, Museo nazionale delle arti del XXI secolo, Rome, Italy
- We don't need another hero*, 10th Berlin Biennale, Berlin, 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

The Revolution Will Not Be Televised, Sound Effects Seoul, Seoul, South Korea
Afrotopia, 11th African Biennale of Photography, Bamako, Mali
Witness, Karachi Biennale KB17, Karachi, Pakistan
a good neighbor, 15th Istanbul Biennial, curated by Elmgreen & Dragset, 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, NL

2016

Transparency Machines: Image Ex Machina, Arts Santa Monica, Barcelona
Beton, Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna, Austria
The City in the Blue Daylight, Dak’Art Biennale, Dakar, Senegal
Cairotronica, Cairo, Egypt
Ultrahabitat, Zilberman Gallery, Berlin, Germany
Marrakech Biennale Parallel Projects, Marrakech, Morocco
Making Use, Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, Poland
Forum Expanded, 66th Berlinale, Berlin, Germany
Fluidity, Kunstverein in Hamburg, Germany

2015

To What End?, Camera Austria, Graz, Austria
Say What?, Zilberman Gallery, Istanbul, Turkey
Difference Screen, Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb, Croatia

2014

Les Rencontres Internationales de la Photo de Fes–8eme edition, Institut Francais, Morocco
Hopes and Impediments, Prince Claus Fund Gallery, Amsterdam, NL
Art of Peace, Artraker Award Exhibition, London, UK
A Time for Dreams, curated by David Elliot, IV Moscow International Biennale for Young Art, Russia
9th Forum Expanded: *What Do We Know When We Know Where Something Is?* 64th Berlinale, Berlin, Germany

2013

Pioneering Values, WRO 15th Media Art Biennale, Wroclaw, Poland
Subtle rEvolutions, The Hybrid City II, Athens, Greece
Recording Against Regimes, Darb 1718, Cairo, Egypt
Difference Screen, ARKO Arts Centre, Seoul, South Korea
Difference Screen, Artisterium, Tbilisi, Georgia

Difference Screen, Mongolian National Modern Art Gallery, Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia
Difference Screen, Clearwell Caves, Forest of Dean, UK

SELECT ARTIST RESIDENCIES

2016 Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin Germany
2015 Botin Foundation, Santander, Spain
2014 *Invisible Borders*, the Trans African Road Trip, Lagos to Sarajevo
2011 DEFAULT Masterclass, Ramdom, Lecce, IT
2011 Platforma 11, Leipzig, Germany
2005 Women’s Art Institute, MCAD, Minneapolis, MN
2002 Intermedia Arts, Minneapolis, MN

SELECT AWARDS AND COMMISSIONS

2018 Kunstpreis der Böttcherstrasse short-list, Bremen, Germany
2018 Valletta 2018 Art Commission, European Capital of Culture, Malta
2017 Visiting Fellow, DCRL, Centre for Digital Cultures, Leuphana University, Lüneburg, Germany
2017 Shuttleworth Foundation Flash Grant
2016 Interkultur Ruhr Art Commission, Metropole Ruhr, Germany
2014 Artraker Artist Prize short-list
2010-2012 DAAD Stipendium, Science and Technology, Berlin, Germany
2009 Production Grant *Rhizome Commissions Program* New Museum, NYC, NY

SELECT LECTURE PERFORMANCES AND ARTIST TALKS
2018

The General’s Stork, Kunstverein, Munich, Germany
Cultural Subversion as Artistic Practice, Hochschule für Grafik und Buchkunst Leipzig, Germany

2017

Cultural Subversion as Artistic Practice, Cosmopolis, Centre Pompidou, Paris, France
The General’s Stork, 15th Istanbul Biennial, Istanbul, Turkey
Subverting the Media as Artistic Practice, Fill in the Blank III, Weissensee Art Academy, Berlin, Germany
Heba Amin with Anahita Razmi, Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin, Germany

2016

The General’s Stork, Asia Contemporary Art Week, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, NYC, USA
Subverting the Media as Artistic Practice, Utrecht School of the Arts, The Netherlands
Subverting the Media as Artistic Practice, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, USA
The General’s Stork, Zilberman Gallery, Berlin, Germany
Subverting the Media as Artist Practice, Staedelschule Frankfurt, Germany
Techno-Social Dreams: Digital Remembrance in the Egyptian Revolution, After Tahrir Symposium, UC Santa Barbara

2015

The Phantom-State: Mediating “Zones of Transmigration” through Images, Medina Gallery, Bamako, Mali
Reconfigured Territories: Urban Topologies and New Technologies, Future Perfect, Steirischer Herbst, Conference, Graz, Austria,
Maps of Myths, Videonale.15: Festival for Contemporary Video Art Bonn, Germany
Glocal (Hi)stories, Free University, Berlin, Germany

2014

Maps of Myths: Memory Space and Digital Remembrance in the Egyptian Revolution, re:publica 14 conference Berlin, Germany
Project Speak2Tweet” Esc atelier, Rome, Italy

2013

Voices from the Revolution, Media Art Histories Conference 2013: RENEW Riga, Latvia
Project Speak2Tweet, Keynote speech, Berlin Social Media Week, Berlin, Germany
Speak2Tweet: An Intimate Look at the Egyptian Psyche, The Hybrid City Conference II: Subtle rEvolutions Athens, Greece
The Revolution of Jokes, re:publica 13 Conference Berlin, Germany

SELECT PUBLICATIONS AS AUTHOR

2017 “To Think and Rethink the Terms of History” Medina: Au coeur de Bamako, Black Athena Collective
2016 “Towards a Spatial Imaginary: Walking Cabbages and Watermelons” Ibraaz
2016 “The Question of Artistic Freedom” Doppiozero, Italy
2015 “Graffiti artists explain: Why ‘Homeland is watermelon’ went viral” Special to CNN online
2014 “Memory Space and Digital Remembrance: the Speak2Tweet Archive” | Techno-Ecologoes II. Acoustic Space #12
2013 “Speak2Tweet: An Intimate Look at the Egyptian Psyche” subtle rEvolutions Hybrid City, Athens, Greece
2009 “Fragmented City: Visualizing the City/Psyche Relationship of Cairo” Journal of the New Media Caucus

Acknowledgments

Texts

1. Al-Haytham, Ibn. *The Optics of Ibn Al-Haytham: Books I-III On Direct Vision*. Ed. J.B. Trapp. The Warburg Institute: London, 1989.
2. Alloula, Malek. *The Colonial Harem*. University of Minnesota Press, 1986.
3. Goupil-Fesquet, Frédéric. *Voyage d’Horace Vernet en Orient*. Bruxelles C. Muquardt, 1844.
4. Hopkins, J.F.P, and Nehemia Levtzion. *Corpus of Early Arabic Sources for West African History*. Markis Wiener Publishers: Princeton, 2000.
5. Papadopoulos, Dimitris, Niamh Stephenson and Vassilis Tsianos. *Escape Routes Control and Subversion in the 21st Century*. Pluto Press: London, 2008.

Images

1. Diagram of the two eyes by Ibn Al-Haytham, excerpt from the oldest manuscript of his work, written by his son-in-law, 1080. Istanbul, Fatih Library (MS 3212, fol. 81b). (p. 5)
2. al-Bakri moon crater, Lunar and Planetary Institute, NASA (p. 6)
3. Horace Vernet, Frédéric Goupil-Fesquet, *Harem De Mehemet-Ali*, 1839. Lithograph. (p. 56-57)
4. Albrecht Durer. *Draughtsman Drawing a Recumbent Woman*, 1525. Woodcut, 8 x 22 cm. Albertina, Vienna, Austria (p. 43)

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