



ONE OF MANY STORIES

Art Worlds in Yemen

From Saturday, April 15 to Saturday, May 6, 2017

Opening on Saturday, April 15, 3 pm to 4 pm (press) - 4 pm to 9 pm (general public)

Curator: Anahi Alviso-Marino



The Free Workshop, Aden, between 1976 and 1978. Courtesy: Abdallah Obeid.

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With Hashem Ali, Abdallah al-Ameen, Boushra Almutawakel, Yasser al-Ansi, Elham al-Arashi, Archives of the newspaper *14 October* (Aden), Nasser al-Aswadi, Ali Baraas, Contemporary Art Group, Mohamed Abdo Dail, Ali al-Dharhani, Amal Fadhel, Ali Abdo al-Faqiyya, Fine Arts Institute (Aden), the Free Workshop (Aden), French Center for Archeology and Social Sciences (Sana'a), Bayt al-Halaqa, Abbas al-Junaydi, Kawn Foundation (Sana'a), Ahmed al-Kharazi, Guillaume Merere, Ministry of Culture and Tourism of Yemen, Fuad al-Muqbil, Talal al-Najjar, Amna al-Nassiri, Abdallah Obeid, Marine Poirier, Reema Qasem, Nasser al-Qawi, Farid Sameed, The Atelier (Sana'a), Soviet Cultural Center (Aden), Jameel Subay, Murad Subay, Surikov State Academy Art Institute (Moscow), Union of Visual Artists, Abdul Rahman Taha, Awraq al-Tashkiliyya, Jacques Veerman, Ali Mohamed Yahya...

By tracing both personal and collective trajectories to question the role of the artist in Yemeni society, *One of Many Stories* seeks to restore the multiple art worlds in contemporary Yemen. This sociological question is articulated throughout constellations of documents and artworks presented in the exhibition and through different approaches: How does one become an artist in Yemen? How is this process historicized? What is the relationship between Yemeni artists and state institutions? How do they attempt to contest or circumvent authoritarian power? How do Yemeni artists relate to the rest of the world?

Yemen, situated at the southwestern tip of the Arabian Peninsula, is one of the poorest countries of the region and is historically marked by great political instability. Today, it is branded by the media coverage of violence, terrorism and civil war. Often, the question "Is there Yemeni art?" summarises the various interrogations that emerge in organizing an exhibition about Yemen's art worlds. The question itself reveals a lack of available tools to appreciate modern and contemporary Yemeni visual art, particularly when the observer is foreign, understands different aesthetic valorizations, and when there is a virtual absence of sources on this field. The exhibition thus seeks to rectify this by presenting a rich, varied and eclectic source of documents.

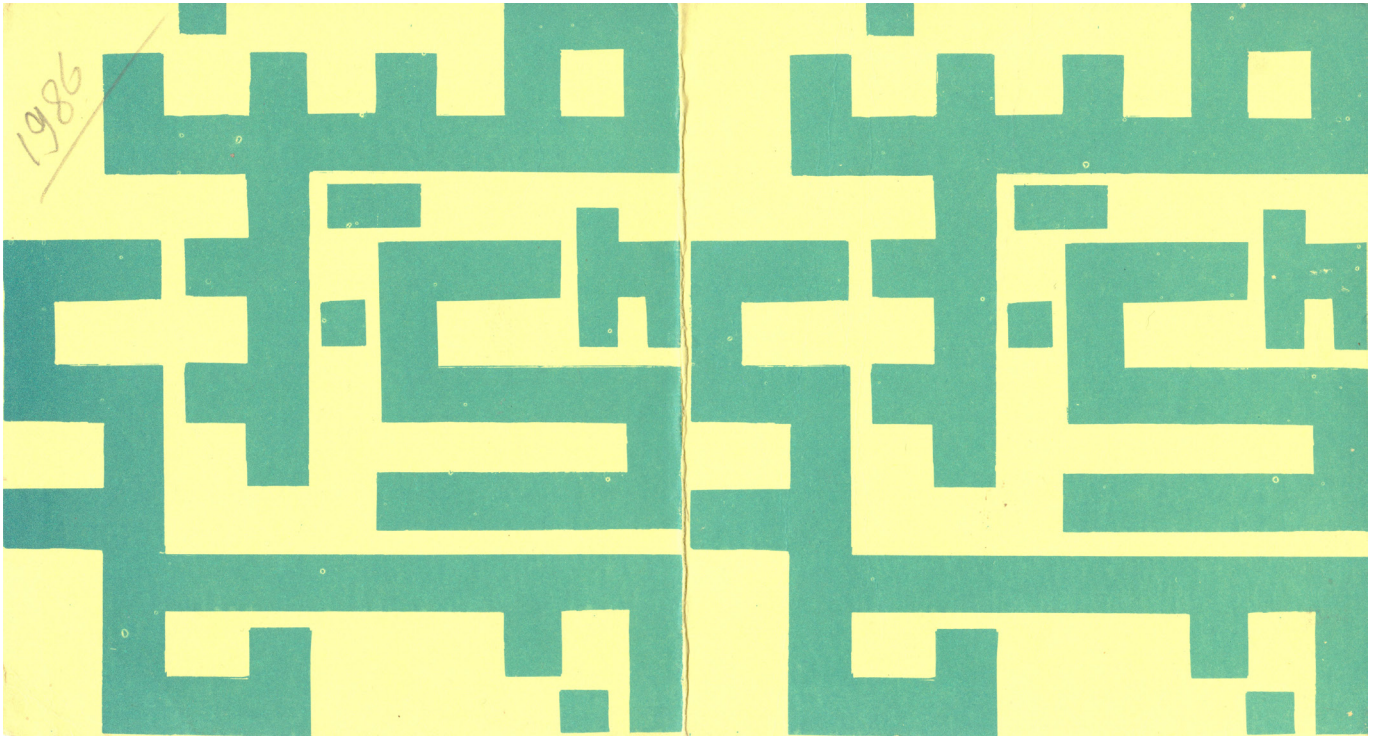
Collected during fieldwork conducted from 2008 to 2011 as part of a doctorate in political sociology, the exhibited documents were donated either by artists or were part of materials that were recorded, photographed and archived during this research. By studying and exhibiting these documents and by proposing to observe through them the interdependences between artists and political actors, the exhibition offers a different image of Yemen. These collaborative and competitive interdependencies reveal underlying relations of domination, whose mechanisms can be, and have been, creative and productive. While indeed state institutions play a fundamental role in the emergence of artistic scenes in Aden and Sana'a, artists equally accompany

this creation, consolidation and questioning of political regimes. For instance, some artists represent the ideals of the Socialist political project in former South Yemen; they project and materialize Yemen's unity through paintings and posters, or they document through photography the contentious mobilizations of 2011.

Other elements emerge from the gaps that appear while reconstructing a history of art worlds and their interactions with political powers and social order. The personal trajectories of Yemeni artists are one of such elements – the journey of Hashem Ali and Ali Ghaddaf to Kuwait in the 1970s, Elham al-Arashi's education in Moscow in the 1980s, the creation of the al-Halaqa group in Sana'a in the 1990s, Jameel Subay's involvement in the contentious mobilizations of 2011, the ongoing street art campaigns initiated by Murad Subay. These micro-histories, which are retraced using a series of documents, highlight singular individualities and complex and cosmopolitan artistic trajectories.

The exhibition implicitly reveals the complexities of retracing an art history of a country stuck in war – the escalation of armed conflict since the end of 2014 and the beginning of 2015 has developed into a civil war, intensified by the military intervention led by Saudi Arabia and a coalition of countries supported by France among other states. Some of the exhibited documents and artworks bear the mark of their history – Amna al-Nassiri's slightly damaged painting and Talal al-Najjar's drawings that were forced to be preserved outside of Yemen – and, equally, the absence of others underlines the difficulty of continuing fieldwork in such a context. With the impossibility of knowing what remains from the current bombings in Yemen, a simple photocopy thus changes its status, becoming as valuable as an original document, facing the same possibility of destruction.

Anahi Alviso-Marino



Invitation card from the al-Ameen Gallery (Aden, 1986- ?) Courtesy: Abdallah al-Ameen



The painter Abdallah al-Ameen in Soviet Union, January 1978. Courtesy: Abdallah al-Ameen

VILLA VASSILIEFF & BÉTONSALON - CENTER FOR ART AND RESEARCH

Bétonsalon - Center for Art and Research offers a space of collective reflection that combines both artistic and academic practices, and questions the production and dissemination of knowledge. We develop our activities in a process-based, collaborative, and discursive manner, following different time spans, in cooperation with various local, national, and international organizations. Exhibitions are enriched by different associated events (workshops, conferences, performances, round table discussions...). We organize seminars and workshops in collaboration with faculty members from the Paris Diderot University. We lead off-site research projects in partnership with other institutions, and offer residency programs for researchers, artists, and curators.

Bétonsalon - Center for Art and Research is a non-profit organization established in Paris in 2003. Since 2007, Bétonsalon has been located on the campus of the Paris Diderot University. In 2016, we launched the Académie Vivante (Living Academy) program, an experimental research laboratory within the Epigenetics and Cell Fate unit (CNRS / Université Paris Diderot) that invites

artists in residency. This same year, we launched Villa Vassillieff, our second site of activities, in the former studio of artist Marie Vassillieff, located in the heart of the Montparnasse neighborhood. Until 2013, this location was the Museum of Montparnasse. Villa Vassillieff is a cultural establishment of the City of Paris.

Villa Vassillieff intends to reconnect with the history of its location by inviting artists and researchers to take a contemporary look at the heritage of Montparnasse. Our exhibitions and public programs focus on exploring lesser-known resources and aim at re-writing and diversifying historical art narratives. Among many grant and residency opportunities, we joined forces with our leading sponsor Pernod Ricard to create the Pernod Ricard Fellowship, a residency program inviting four international artists, curators, or researchers every year in the Villa's studio. We collaborate closely with museums and curators to design tailor-made research projects and bring innovative perspectives, as illustrated by the ongoing Marc Vaux program jointly led by Villa Vassillieff and Centre Pompidou's Kandinsky Library.

Bétonsalon - Center for Art and Research is supported by the City of Paris, the Paris Diderot University - Paris 7, the Île-de-France Regional Board of Cultural Affairs - Ministry of Culture and Communication, the Île-de-France Region and Leroy Merlin - Quai d'Ivry.

The Académie vivante is supported by the Fondation Daniel et Nina Carasso.

Bétonsalon - Center for Art and Research is a member of Tram, réseau art contemporain Paris / Île-de-France and of d.c.a / association française de développement des centres d'art.

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