

The Changing Room: Arab Reflections on Praxis and Times

Curated by Aida Eltorie

www.thechangingroomproject.org
(site under construction, launching September 10th)

Location: Spazio Qubi in association with Metro Quadro Gallery (Rivoli)

Opening: Friday, September 23rd - October 22nd 2011



Image: Nermine Hammam, from *Upekkha* series, 2011. Image copyrighted to the Artist

Featuring Artists

Adel Abidin, Iraq
Sama Alshaibi, Palestine/Iraq
Kader Attia, Algeria
Khaled Hafez, Egypt
Karim Al Hussein, Palestine
Ibrahim Saad, Egypt
Steve Sabella, Palestine
Larissa Sansour, Palestine
Ahmed El Shaer, Egypt
Anas El Sheikh, Bahrain
Nermine Hammam, Egypt
Marwan Sahmarani, Lebanon
Ines Jarray, Tunis
Khaled Ramadan, Lebanon
Bassem Yousry, Egypt

Featured Essays

Martina Corgnati, Italy
Aida Eltorie, Egypt
Sara Rossino, Italy
Amira Al Ahl, Egypt
Mariam Hamdy, Egypt
Heba El Kayal, Egypt
Wafa Gabsi, Tunis
Aladin Al-Kimi, UK

**** PRESS RELEASE ****

The Changing Room: Arab Reflections on Praxis and Times is a project addressing an adversity of change towards the recent events happening in the Middle East region today. A new change arises, and with it comes a promise to a new history in contemporary art from the Arab region, designed by the 15 artists represented here.

When you detail the visual narratives proposed by the collective of works presented, the events that unraveled in the past months were questioned, predestined, and contemplated to happen. The Middle East region just witnessed a revolution against autocracy and oppression, a revolution against social scrutiny and silence. The 18 days it took to unravel Egyptians in the reality of exhaustion and humiliation, triggered by what initially arose in Tunisia, and then running through the veins of Algeria, Bahrain, Libya and Syria, to say the least, Egyptian Revolts became a global emblem of civil freedom sparked by a digital postmark, fostered out of public certitude, and obedient to social conformity. Information is your power and Vigor is your tool.

It is in *The Changing Room* project is the artist proposed as protagonist, seeker, observer and storyteller. S/he continues their personal observations about their actual experiences from a selection of backgrounds either been displaced or in combat, under occupation or corrupt federal lead for years subservient to the so-called United Arab Republic.

The United Arab Republic, which initiated between Egypt and Syria from 1958 - 1961, came the making of the Arab Liberation Flag, which consisted of three horizontal bands of color: red, white and black with two green stars in the white center. During the same year of its foundation, came the Arab Federation consisting of Iraq and Jordan of which leaders were Hashemite cousins, and sought to oppose what the UAR was achieving. What stood between them was an All-Palestine government lead by Hajj Amin Al Hussein (Mufti of Jerusalem), who coincidentally is also the grandfather of one of the artists we present here. Karim Al Hussein marks his ancestral heritage with an eight-pointed star, acknowledging the seal of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), and his journey to pilgrimage, by installing one bearing out of eight locations, in search of his paradise.

Larissa Sansour's *A Space Exodus*, shows her longing as well as reality of displacement, by becoming the first Palestinian to walk on the moon vis a vis a remake to Stanley Kubrick's *Space Odyssey* in a very satirical format. A third Palestinian of mixed heritage, Steve Sabella motions us through his Euphoria. A transitory euphoria seeking the subsequence after being displaced, motioned and rebelled from where you once were to where you are now. He left Jerusalem in 2003, and returns every now and then, as an observer of change that keeps occurring to his city, but also watches the break out through news networks, of an attempted United Arab Republic fuse into complete national turmoils.

Khaled Hafez adopts the format of a video diary, and creates a narrative by sequencing personal footage and those of friends taken by amateur cyber shot cameras from different parts of the city during the 18 days of the Egyptian Revolution; this narrative is

enhanced by déjà vu media propagated imagery extracted from Youtube and other Internet portals. Hafez constructed his story line through cumulative testimonials over the phone, through friends who were either on the grounds silently protesting, or reporting via online methods. His *TV Diaries* photo-project depict the frozen imagery of what the *live* revolution offered and document the moment by moment live reporting of the effervescent event.

Khaled Ramadan, hosts a Skype conversation from Copenhagen with co-curator and friend Alfredo Cramerotti in Nottingham, questioning the ownership of history: the notion of being Lebanese in comparison to the ownership of being Italian, Belgian, or Flemish who carry several cultural nations as opposed to being one national state, and vice versa. Their thoughts linger towards nation as a state of mind, as opposed to national as a state of being. Nermine Hammam proposes the age of the soldier as the protector, the fighter, the warrior, however since the unroll onto the streets of Cairo on February 4th, 2011, she has recreated a visual occupation of what defined the land they engaged with. With a backdrop of the Alps, and beautiful pink flower fields, Hammam reconsiders the definition of a harness, when repression is overthrown, and an illusion of solace replaces the harshness of power.

Sama Alshaibi discovers *Thowra*; her own take of the revolution seen through the turmoil brought about the natural existence of being, with the unexplained beginning of thousands of black birds dropping dead from the sky, to an eclipse and regional rebel fire caught across the rest of the Arab region. Alshaibi occupies her journey by visiting the rivers of Tunis, snowfields of Arizona and sands of Egypt to cross and unite the boundaries of creation.

These are but a few suggestions to the works presented here. Marking an amalgam of installations, prints and videographies, characterizing the MENA region with a frame of socio-political reference: To know one's history might also suggest the knowledge of what will happen next. But no matter how many times history repeats itself, we can't seem to stop ourselves from motioning through the process of *verite*. Artists are the documenters, they mark the time and place of the event, regardless of how abstract or literal their verses are voiced: Loud and clear, proud and magnificent, unsightly or progressive, beautiful and regressive. They move forward to keep returning to that starting point, and ironically it is also the finishing line. Motioning through contemporary history, a proactive group of artists who occupy a fragment of society's foreseers, protagonists and citizens of desired change: The works in this exhibition show a great deal of prediction, anticipation, as well as criticism towards the turn of events, their past and their unforeseen future. Its in the detail of every artist, will you find the rebel deep inside, and it is in gratitude to Metro Quadro Gallery in association with Spazio Qubi and associate curator Sara Rossino, will these works be available on a high platform of dialogue and recognition in Turin this Fall. We also like to extend our gratitude to Martina Corgnati, who twenty years ago started exploring, studying and writing about the Middle East art scene, in belief that one day this region will have its contribution to contemporary art history.

Aida Eltorie, Chief Curator
Cairo, August 2011

This project is supported by Al Mawred Al Thaqafy (The Culture Resource), The Ford Foundation, European Cultural Foundation (ECF), Accademia D'Arte Firenze (ADA), Lawrie Shabibi Gallery, and Allianz Kulturstiftung. Curated by Aida Eltorie, and organized by Finding Projects Association.

Spazio Qubi
via Parma 75/c Torino
www.qubito.it
info@qubito.it

Metroquadro Arte Gallery
info@metroquadroarte.com
www.metroquadroarte.com

Finding Projects Association
info@findingprojects.org
www.findingprojects.org