



**Jasmina Metwaly &
Yazan Khalili
14 March – 19 April 20**

Mophradat's Consortium Commissions:

Jasmina Metwaly & Yazan Khalili

14 March – 19 April 20

Opening: 13 March 20, 7 pm

Initiated by Mophradat, the *Consortium Commissions* is a pioneering model for co-commissioning new work which exemplifies the organization's inventive approach to supporting artists from the Arab world. With solo exhibitions by Jasmina Metwaly (born in 1982, PL) and Yazan Khalili (born in 1981, SY), KW Institute for Contemporary Art presents work by two artists as part of the program's first edition. The resulting display is neither a thematic duo show nor a collaboration; rather the shared priorities of these two commissions are of another type altogether. Both Metwaly and Khalili seek to reflect the political upheavals of their surroundings—in Cairo and Ramallah respectively—in the work's content as well as in their working methodology as artists. Both are invested in collaborative practices beyond their exhibitionary output, and both foreground the importance of new support systems for artists in today's professional context. The resulting exhibition grants both practitioners an ample platform, and yet it offers a common ground that is dense, vibrant and unique—and is further explored as such in the public program.



Jasmina Metwaly, *Anbar*, 2019, Courtesy the artist

Jasmina Metwaly's *Anbar* (2019) presents three closely interrelated short films addressing contemporary Egypt after the 2011 revolution, the country's military apparatus, and the related societal enactments. The cycle is organized around three characters: Assem, a former Egyptian soldier who served in the Marines' elite unit; Badrawi, a military tailor closely associated with a generation of Egyptian "gentleman" nationalists; and Aida, an Egyptian filmmaker re-enacting Assem's story, who lets her own "external" experience slip into his account of an all-male environment. Another work presented alongside, *Untitled (Thank you notes)*, *Anbar* (2019), speaks of the need for contemporary filmmakers in popular Egyptian cinema to "normalize" themselves by including credits to thank the ruling regime.

Metwaly's various practices as film-maker, activist and member of *Mosireen*—a non-profit media collective operating between media and cultural activism, which published the largest archive to date of filmed footage documenting the Egyptian revolution—explore the genre of documentary, only to arrive at its supposed opposite: fiction, artificial construct. As either onlooker, interviewer or disembodied voice engaging in the discussion taking place in front of the camera, Metwaly investigates how camera frames, shots and distances change how we understand the politicized image. Where to locate political agency in the face of political stasis? *Anbar (Badrawi's atelier)* (2019), for example, suggests that what appears utterly banal or discreet might actually be what is most oppressive: Badrawi's careful measuring of a young soldier's body, his proud anecdotes about the stylishness of former president Anwar el-Sadat, and the comforting noises of sewing machines and manual labor—all of this nonchalance, as Metwaly's works show, only masks what political agendas are inscribed into, making them difficult to oppose.

The metal fences intermittently lining the walls of the show serve as infrastructure and also to denaturalize the exhibition experience. In collaboration with friend and tailor, Marta Szypulska, Metwaly has created five costumes from various camouflage fabrics.

The costumes' making, the fitting and the labor involved reappears in *Anbar (Marta's studio)* (2019), where Metwaly and Szypulska chat in an intimate, domestic setting, juxtaposed with images of Aida re-enacting the words of Assem's story. The account of the artist (as it unfolds in the nearby *Anbar (Assem's pictures)* (2019), who experienced a state of mental disassociation as he underwent rigid, violent physical and psychological exercises in the military, is then newly embodied in the close-ups of Aida, reading his same words from a script, but adding her own improvised thoughts as she speaks. For Assem, the photographs he illicitly took of his sleeping colleagues were his only outlet of subjectivity. Tellingly, his face and body are never shown in the film, and it is Aida who mirrors his subjects' conditions.

The exhibition by Jasmina Metwaly is part of the *Consortium Commissions*—a project initiated by Mophradat, and is also presented in association with Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (US).

Jasmina Metwaly thanks Mohamed El-Badrawi (military tailor), Aida ElKashef (actress), Guda (editor), Assem Hendawi (filmmaker), Beya Othmani (producer Berlin), Marta Szypulska (costume designer), and Ola Zielinska (production).



Yazan Khalili, *Medusa*, 2020, Courtesy the artist

Yazan Khalili presents *Medusa* (2020), a video installation building on the Ramallah-based artist's long-standing engagement with digital archiving in times of political unrest. Khalili asks whether digital archives can be a media that emancipates memory from overdetermined, institutionalized narratives. More specifically, *Medusa* engages with the rise of facial recognition technologies. The human face is quickly becoming an everyday mode of personal identification, prompting a host of well-known dystopic scenarios.

Among the six visual narratives that comprise the work, a Ramallah shop vendor argues that his found objects amount to faces set in stone. A Medusa mask is gently rendered tangible while a mobile phone is superimposed on the screen. Meanwhile, a voice-over ruminates on sheer historical survival in Palestine.

Throughout *Medusa*, strategies of collectivism and collectivity are emphasized repeatedly—the latter being a key facet of Khalili's work beyond his individual artistic practice. His recent directorship of the Khalil Sakakini Cultural Center Ramallah was dedicated to rethinking art and culture as economic fields, in the hope of proposing new political models for collective organization beyond the usual flows of money and communication within the arts.

Even as an individual practitioner, Khalili continues to address the weight of an inescapable past, together with the momentous promise of imagining a future beyond it—whether by means of a *droit de suite* contract, a monochrome or a video format. By way of underhanded abstraction, speculative love stories, or a bank robbery narrative, prevailing circumstances are at once darkly affirmed and wryly superseded.

As the mythological figure of Greek antiquity, Medusa signifies both a mesmerizing angel of death and a casualty of petty politics among the gods. She appears as the epic executioner *non plus ultra*, but never chose to be eternally chained to her rage. Moreover, despite being the archetype of the deadly gaze that petrifies, reifies, and dehumanizes, Medusa can be overcome if one mirrors her powers back onto her. Technology itself

is not an untouchable abstraction, floating somewhere ethereally, beyond human agency; it is concocted by humans and their respective weaknesses. It relies on images, histories, codes, decisions, regulations and glitches, all of which allow for a host of options in turn. Technology, the work argues, can and should be considered in terms of the overtly emancipatory capacity of human imagination.

In the installation at KW, the materiality of the interface is emphasized. Far from a transparent, unnoticed device, the screen is foregrounded and beset with cracks, smartphones and tablets superimposed. The palimpsest of plastic and glass renders the interface contingent and fissured, as opposed to intangible and detached. In a similar vein, the viewer cannot dip in and out of *Medusa*, as in a more comfortable art installation. As an audience, we only get the full picture if we submit to a claustrophobic itinerary between the screens.

The exhibition by Yazan Khalili is part of the *Consortium Commissions*—a project initiated by Mophradat, and is also presented at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Toronto (CA).

Public program

Why and How

Roundtable discussion with Yazan Khalili, Mai Abu ElDahab, Kathrin Bentele, Krist Gruijthuijsen, Tirdad Zolghadr
14 March 20, 1.30–4.30pm
Venue: KW Studio, front building, 1st floor
In English

Jasmina Metwaly & Philip Rizk

Out on the Street (2015)
Film screening followed by a conversation with Jasmina Metwaly
14 March 20, 5 pm
Venue: KW Studio, front building, 1st floor
In English

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Opening Hours

Wednesday–Monday 11 am–7 pm
Thursday 11 am–9 pm
Closed on Tuesday

Admission Charges

8 € / reduced 6 €
Combined Day Ticket KW / me Collectors Room Berlin
10 € / reduced 8 €
berlinpass holder 4 €
Free admission to visitors up to and including 18,
Freunde of KW, holders of the KW Lover* card, and on
Thursday evenings from 6 to 9 pm

Guided Tours

Guided tour with curator Tirdad Zolghadr
19 March 20, 6 pm
In English

Guided tour with assistant curator Kathrin Bentele
16 April 20, 6 pm
In German

Free guided tours

During regular opening hours, visitors of KW can participate in short introductions to the exhibitions by the KW Guides. Please reach out to our staff at the counter.

Public guided tours through the exhibitions
Every Saturday at 4 pm in English
Every Sunday at 4 pm in German

Individual guided tours

60 minutes: 70 € / reduced 55 € plus reduced entrance fee per person (free admission up and including 18 years). For further information on group tours, please contact Katja Zeidler at kaz@kw-berlin.de.

Colophon

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Head of Installation, Media Technology: Markus Krieger
Installation team: KW Installation Team
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مفرّدات Mophradat

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Senate Department
for Culture and Europe



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