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Press Release winter/spring program 2020

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Hassan Sharif

I Am The Single Work Artist

New dates:
30 May – 19 July 20

“The essence of localism is to bestow upon objects of heritage an amended and progressive position that negates the dullness of regurgitated concepts like identity, language, customs and traditions, and to give them complementary qualities and intellectual, visual, dynamic, enjoyable and meaningful dimensions that encourage new sorts of questions.”

–Hassan Sharif (1951–2016)

In collaboration with Sharjah Art Foundation (UAE) and Malmö Konsthall (SE), KW Institute for Contemporary Art presents the first retrospective of Emirati artist Hassan Sharif in Europe. Hailed as one of the most important Middle Eastern artists of the twentieth century, Sharif became a groundbreaking pioneer in conceptual art by reconsidering the conventional understanding of time, space, form, and social interaction. Sharif, who lived and worked in Dubai, was one of the first artists to break with the classical conventions of art production in the Arab world and reinvented them with an innovative, experimental approach that continues to resonate among subsequent generations. Detached from local art production, he articulated an artistic language that was non-elitist, pared-down, process-based, and inspired by Fluxus. Within the tradition-conscious Arab world, however, his art was dismissed as unrepresentative, while in the West, there was talk of mere imitation.

Born in the United Arab Emirates in the beginning of the 1950s, Sharif grew up in a time of great upheaval. After oil was discovered in the Gulf region in the early 1960s, the area changed overnight, and the economically weak desert region of the Emirates became a sovereign nation marked by its desire for progress. Sharif discovered his curiosity and affinity for art at a very early age and independently studied masters of Modernism such as Vincent van Gogh, Paul Cézanne, and Pablo Picasso, whose works he discovered through English books. Since he did not speak English, however, this first encounter with European art was informed purely by his observations on aesthetics, form, and style. During the social and economic upheaval in the Emirates, Sharif was working for the weekly magazine *Akhbar Dubai*, drawing caricatures and ironic cartoons relating to everyday life and politics. His provocative and satirical works quickly gained popularity and remain significant today as historical evidence of that period and culture. Through this practice, Sharif developed his critical voice in society at an early stage and was never too self-conscious to express his opinion on things, which he saw as his duty as an artist. While many of his contemporary colleagues were interested in a revision of traditional Arab art under the auspices of Modernism, Sharif continued with his autodidactic practice, learned English, and explored movements such as Dadaism and Surrealism, reproducing their painterly styles in his own manner in order to understand and internalize them. Sharif began his studies in London in 1979. While being abroad he moved within an intellectual circle that was to become inspirational for his views and practice. During this period, he also intensively studied Marcel Duchamp's works, which had a lasting influence on his understanding of art. At the same time, Sharif adopted various postmodern artistic trends in London such as Abstract Expressionism, Minimalism, Performance Art, Pop Art, and Fluxus. Of main importance was a group of London

artists who started a local movement with their examination of the modern manifestations of Constructivism and were known as the “Constructionists.” Sharif was primarily influenced by their way of systemic thinking, which he reflected, for example, in his grid drawings or his photographic works created between 1981 and 1985. Further, his work was also influenced by the Fluxus movement, which had a great impact on his performative practice at the time. One of his first early performances took place in the Hatta Desert near Dubai. The photographic documentation shows the artist carrying out ordinary sequences of movement such as walking, jumping, or digging, which, without context or any sense of purpose, lose their actual meaning. In their non-linearity, they subvert repetition, immateriality, and site-specificity as hitherto classic forms of work. After completing his studies in 1984, Sharif consciously decided to return to the United Arab Emirates in order to support the local scene with his newly acquired knowledge. With the help of the government of Sharjah, he launched the Al Marijah studio, which became the center of intellectual life in the United Arab Emirates, and which he used to introduce a younger generation of artists to contemporary theory and praxis. At the same time, Sharif organized exhibitions at various venues such as the Al Markazi Market in Sharjah, where he presented works alongside other contemporary artists. His contribution resembled a readymade, consisting of two abstract geometric square paintings resembling a chessboard. One was placed on four water bottles, the other on the floor with the bottles placed in each of the four corners. Both works were reminiscent of elements of local architecture, as well as the low tables in the market where one drinks tea or coffee while sitting on the floor or on cushions. One year later, Sharif used the Al Marijah studio itself as an exhibition venue—he painted the exterior walls of the building and the outbuildings between which he stretched a rope with stones. Both projects are examples of how Sharif would always regard his artistic production as situated in a social context as well as try to ground it in the public debate. In this respect, it was also important for the artist not to use valuable materials, but rather to show that objects found on the street were entirely sufficient to create works of art. This way of working attracted a great deal of attention and was subject of heated public discussions as the interventionist method of combining art with everyday objects was met with a great deal of incomprehension. Sharif viewed these reactions in a relaxed manner. His primary goal was to give the audience new food for thought. In line with this objective, the artist also experimented with site-specific works in the kitchen, bathroom, and corridors of the Al Marijah studio.

One of his most important work cycles also began during this time; the works grouped under the name *Objects—Urban Archaeology* are thus also prominently displayed in the exhibition. During his stays in Sharjah, Dubai, and the Hatta Desert which he made amid his university holidays, Sharif explored the particular aesthetics of his surroundings. His attention was drawn to the natural landscape on the one hand, and the aesthetics of the production of material goods on the other. His interest in the seemingly banal and mundane was sparked by his study of Duchamp, but also by his preoccupation with John Cage and his way of dealing with his immediate surroundings. “*Art becomes important as a means to make one aware of one’s actual environment*”—this credo was essential to Sharif’s works, as his period abroad had given him a different perspective on his country of origin. Here, too, the Al Markazi market was both a stimulus and a source of inspiration. Characteristic of *Objects—Urban Archaeology* is the amassing of objects and various materials such as torn clothing, old news- papers rolled up and arranged vertically in a corner of a room, jute strips stuck together, or homemade papier-mâché pellets looking like lozenges. These material accumulations possessed a certain ambiguity: it seemed as if their formations had developed due to natural mutation while however their materiality showed clear evidence of industrial production. Sharif used this ambiguity to work with a variety of references. Using cardboard, rope, cotton, and wire, he created forms that resembled Arab pastries and sweets. At the same time, the material was reminiscent of those used in traditional carpet weaving. Over time, Sharif tended to work more with mass-produced goods and discarded products such as plastic cups, discount toys, metal cans, or cutlery, which he tirelessly altered by cutting, bending, and gluing subsequently putting them on a string.

The dimensions of these hybrid works would vary from small to taking up larger exhibition spaces, resulting in spatial installations. *Objects—Urban Archaeology* testifies not only to the rapid transition from manual to industrial production in the United Arab Emirates, but also to the

artist's critical stance toward consumption. Another important aspect for Sharif was the inherent potential of materials to consolidate memories of actions. For Sharif, frequently used cardboard boxes were a form of historical evidence; the traces of human usage were clearly visible on the surface and—unlike their typical existence in the world—they were thus not merely anonymous objects.

The retrospective at KW is a culmination of Sharif's long history with the United Arab Emirates and presents around 150 works from the artist's diverse oeuvre, including sculptural installations, drawings, performances, paintings, and assemblages.

In conjunction with the exhibition on Hassan Sharif, Valsalan Kanara's documentary *Objects. A documentary on Hassan Sharif* (2006) will be screened at Pogo Bar. On 28 February, 5 and 12 March, as well as on 9 and 24 April 2020 the film will not be on view.

Biography

Hassan Sharif was born in 1951 in Dubai (UAE), where he lived and worked until his death in 2016. After studying at the Byam Shaw School of Art in London, he returned to the United Arab Emirates in 1984 and began staging interventions and contemporary art exhibitions in Sharjah, introducing a generation of artists to conceptual and Fluxus practices for the first time. Moving between his roles as an artist, educator, critic, and writer, Sharif not only sought to encourage Emirati audiences to engage with contemporary art in exhibitions, but also on the page through his Arabic translations of historical art texts and manifestos. By initiating a productive debate and exchange of ideas, he contributed to a new understanding of art in the United Arab Emirates and became a driving force of an experimental approach to finding artistic analogies for a hybrid sense of identity, in which the memory of the recent past of nomadic Bedouin tribes is compatible with a hypermodern present.

Hassan Sharif's works were presented in various solo exhibitions: *Hassan Sharif: I Am The Single Work Artist*, Sharjah Art Foundation (2017/2018); *Hassan Sharif: Objects and Files*, MATHAF Arab Museum of Modern Art in Doha (2016); *Hassan Sharif: Experiments & Objects 1979–2011*, Qasr Al Hosn, Abu Dhabi (2011).

His works were also shown in numerous renowned group exhibitions, including: *The Creative Act: Performance–Process–Presence*, Guggenheim Abu Dhabi (2017); *Is Old Gold?*, Dubai Community Theatre and Arts Centre (2017); *do it □□□□□□□□*, Sharjah Art Foundation (2016); *1980–Today: Exhibitions in the United Arab Emirates*, UAE Pavilion, 56. Venedig Biennale (2015); *Adventures of the Black Square*, Whitechapel Gallery, London (2015); *Artevida (Corpo)*, Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro (2014); *Une Histoire: Art, Architecture and Design from the 1980s to the Present*, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris (2014); *Here and Elsewhere*, New Museum, New York (2014).

Public Program

Film screening:

Werner Herzog *Lessons of Darkness* (1992)

4 March 20, 7 pm

Venue: KW Studio, front building, 1st floor

Admission: 5 € / reduced 3 €

Tickets are only available at the box office

In German with English subtitles

Public tour with assistant curator Cathrin Mayer

5 March 20, 6 pm

Admission: included in exhibition ticket

In English

Film screening:

Alia Farid *At the Time of the Ebb* (2019) & *Maske Paske Wi* (2020)

Followed by a conversation with Alia Farid

8 April 20, 7 pm

Venue: KW Studio, front building, 1st floor

Admission: 5 € / reduced 3 €

Tickets are only available at the box office

In German with English subtitles

Film screening:

Yto Barrada *Hand-Me-Downs* (2011)

Simone Fattal *Autoportrait* (1971/2012)

15 April 20, 7 pm Venue: KW Studio, front building, 1st floor

Admission: 5 € / reduced 3 €

Tickets are only available at the box office

In English

Film screening:

Basma Alsharif *Ouroboros* (2017)

21 April 20, 7 pm

Venue: KW Studio, front building, 1st floor

Admission: 5 € / reduced 3 €

Tickets are only available at the box office.

In English

Public tour with curator Krist Gruijthuisen

23 April 20, 6 pm

Admission: included in exhibition ticket

In English

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, singular events of the public program did not take place.

Mophradat's Consortium Commissions: Jasmina Metwaly & Yazan Khalili

New dates: 30 May – 19 July 20

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'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; Badrawi, a military tailor closely associated with a generation of Egyptian "gentleman" nationalists; and Aida, an Egyptian filmmaker reenacting 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 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).

Biography

Jasmina Metwaly was born in 1982 in Warsaw. She works in video and film and has recently taken up drawing again. Rooted in performance, theater, and film, Metwaly's works focus on process-based practices that have a social function generating tension between participants and audiences. Metwaly lives and works in Berlin and Cairo.

Metwaly's work has been presented in various solo and group exhibitions at venues such as Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (US, 2019), SAVVY Contemporary, Berlin (2018); Jeu de Paume, Paris (2016); Townhouse, Cairo (2015, 2011, 2010); Museum of Modern Art, New York (2015); and National Gallery of Arts, Tirana (AL, 2013). She also participated in the German Pavilion exhibition at the 56th Venice Biennale (IT, 2015) and in the 7th Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art (2012). Her films have also been shown widely at international film festivals, including the Cannes Film Festival (FR, 2013); International Film Festival Rotterdam (NL, 2012); Dubai International Film Festival (AE, 2012); and Berlinale Internationale Filmfestspiele (2011). Since 2010, Metwaly has often collaborated on projects with the filmmaker Philip Rizk. She is a co-founder of the media collective *Mosireen* and of *858 Media Archive*, an online repository of video footage documenting the Egyptian revolution since 2011.

Yazan Khalili was born in 1981. He lives and works in and out of Palestine. He is an architect and visual artist. His works have been exhibited in several major exhibitions, including among others: *New Photography*, MoMA, New York (2019); *Jerusalem Lives*, Palestinian Museum, Birzeit (PS, 2017); *Post-Peace*, Kunstverein Stuttgart (DE, 2017); Shanghai Biennial (CN, 2016); Sharjah Biennial (AE, 2013).

He studied architecture at Birzeit University until 2003 and holds master degrees from the Centre for Research Architecture at Goldsmiths College, London (2010), as well as from the Sandberg Institute, Rietveld Academy, Amsterdam (2015). He was one of the founding members of Zan Design Studio (2005-2010). In 2015 he co-organized the workshop and symposium *Walter Benjamin in Palestine*. In 2015, he won the Extract V young artist prize, and, from 2015 until 2019, he has been the artistic director of Khalil Sakakini Cultural Centre.

His writings and photographs have been featured in several publications, including among others *eflux journal*, *Assuming Boycotts*, *WDW Magazine*, *Kalamon*, *Manifesta Journal*, *Race & Class*.

Currently, he is a faculty member of the MFA program at Bard College, NY, and an artist in residence at the Rijksakademie, Amsterdam.

Public Program

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

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

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the public program did not take place.

Education and Art Mediation

KW Institute for Contemporary Art's education and art mediation program engages with the institution's wide-ranging exhibition and event program and develops ways to extend the topics raised within through the lenses of the broader public. Throughout the year, members of KW's education team collaborate with high schools, universities, artists, art mediators, researchers, educators, neighborhood coordinators, and representatives of different communities from all over Berlin in various formats such as workshops, guided tours, classes, reading groups, and long-term investigations. The aim is to create space in which different perspectives meet for critical exchange by using artistic, experimental and pedagogical methods and eventually build a common ground for action that appreciates diverse bodies of knowledge and experiences. In doing so, the educational projects add new questions to the program and re-contextualize it with an interdisciplinary approach.

Collaborations

KW's mediation program is driven by the needs generated through long-term collaborations with different stakeholders such as artists, art mediators, schools, universities as well as diverse communities from all over Berlin. This has meant moving beyond the institution's own context of ambitious exhibitions and events, and exploring aspects that are touched upon in these programs through educational settings. To enable such a process, KW organizes individual workshop and project settings with each collaborator. Current collaborators include: Alfred-Nobel-Schule, Berlin-Neukölln; Netzwerk Berlin Mondiale; Berlinische Galerie–Museum für Moderne Kunst; Europa-Universität Viadrina, Frankfurt-Oder; Heinz-Brandt-Schule, Berlin-Weißensee; Hemingway-Schule, Berlin-Mitte; Kreativhaus e.V., Berlin-Mitte; Kulturagenten für kreative Schulen; Ruth-Cohn-Schule für Sozialwesen, Berlin-Charlottenburg; Universität der Künste Berlin; Young Arts Neukölln, Stammplatz Begegnungsarchitektur.

Free guided tours

Besides the outreach activities, visitors at KW can participate in short guided tours through the exhibitions and institution, conducted by the KW Guides. This format has been established with the reopening in 2017 and is free of charge for all visitors.

Public guided tours through the exhibitions

Every Saturday at 4 pm in English

Every Sunday at 4 pm in German

Individual guided tours

Group tours can be organized on request. A guided tour for a group up to 25 people (or class size for school classes) takes approx. 60 minutes and can be offered in German or English. Please contact Katja Zeidler at kaz@kw-berlin.de or by phone at +49 30 243459 132.

Costs: regular 70 € / reduced 55 € / plus reduced entrance fee of 6 € per person (free admission up to and including 18 years)

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, KW currently does not offer guided tours.

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General Information

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Opening hours

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

Admission

8 € / reduced 6 €
Combined Day Ticket KW / me Collectors Room Berlin
10 € / reduced 8 €
berlinpass holder 4 €
Groups of 10 or more: Each person 6 €

Free admission to visitors up to and including 18, holders of the KW Lover* card, members of the KW Freunde e. V., and on Thursday evenings from 6 to 9 pm

Reduction is valid for students, retirees, those in community service, welfare recipients, unemployed, and disabled persons (at least 50% "GdB") upon presentation of relevant identification.

Accessibility

Due to construction work, KW cannot currently provide barrier-free access to the exhibitions. In addition, the barrier-free restroom is currently not accessible. The nearest barrier-free restroom is located next door at me Collectors Room, which will be open daily, 12–18 pm (except Tuesday). We ask for your understanding.

The courtyard of KW consists of cobblestones.

Please ring the designated door bell at the main entrance gate (underneath the door bell panel), our staff members will assist you while entering the courtyard of KW as well as the Café Bravo.

Please contact our staff for further information on your visit at +49 30 243459-69.

Partners

Senate Department
for Culture and Europe



KW Institute for Contemporary Art is institutionally supported by the Senate Department for Culture and Europe, Berlin.

Hassan Sharif



SHARJAH ART FOUNDATION

MALMÖ KONSTHALL

The exhibition *I Am The Single Work Artist* by Hassan Sharif is produced in collaboration with Sharjah Art Foundation (UAE) and Malmö Konsthall (SE). This exhibition was originally curated by Hoor Al Qasimi and organized by Sharjah Art Foundation, where it was on display in 2017/2018. The European venues are KW Institute for Contemporary Art and Malmö Konsthall.



The exhibition *Hassan Sharif: I Am The Single Work Artist* is made possible through support from the Capital Cultural Fund.

Mophradat's Consortium Commissions: Jasmina Metwaly & Yazan Khalili

مفردات
Mophradat

The exhibitions by Jasmina Metwaly and Yazan Khalili are commissioned as part of the *Consortium Commissions*—a project initiated by Mophradat.