



HESTIA

ART RESIDENCY &
EXHIBITIONS BUREAU

OTHER STORIES

Taysir Batniji, Larissa Sansour, Vangjush Vellahu, Sharif Waked

With a screening by Jumana Manna

16.10.2022 - 11.12.2022

Četvrtak - Nedelja 12h - 18h
Thursday - Sunday 12pm - 6pm

Topličin Venac 14/9
Beograd - Srbija
Belgrade - Serbia

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The works exhibited at the *Other Stories* exhibition deal with the state of Palestine, a partially recognized occupied state in the Middle East.

A seemingly simple exhibition concept stands out by the comprehensiveness of the exhibited works dealing with the selected theme that is approached from different perspectives which show complexity and multiple layers. Hestia, as *Manifesta 14 Western Balkans Project's* partner to the current *Manifesta 14 Prishtina* biennial in Kosovo, as a *parallel event* in relation to the geographical and political position of Kosovo which is, like Palestine, a partially recognized state, chooses a parallel *tangible* position of Belgrade and the gallery in order to put into the same context and view within it the distant, but politically related and parallel geographies. Since the title of the *Manifesta 14 Prishtina* biennial is *it matters what worlds world worlds. How to tell stories otherwise*, given by the biennial creative mediator Catherine Nichols who has curated it, the exhibition in Hestia also tries to tell the story through the voices of different artists whose views on the subject do not only refer to their personal stories and/or the narratives brought in their works, but also the certain roles that artists take and specific approaches to the media they use.

Let's start with the Albanian artist **Vangjush Vellahu**, the single *outsider* both at the exhibition and within the exhibited two-channel video

installation *Fragments II- A Tool of Resistance* (2020), since unlike other artists he is not a native of Palestine. Through a documentary approach, Vellahu has been dealing with the issue of unrecognized or partially recognized states, an example of which is the multi-channel video installation *Fragments I-Where Stories cut across the land* (2015-2018). Both in *Fragments I*, and in *A Tool of Resistance*, in some way the artist takes on the role of a photo journalist and through interviews, archival footage and footage of everyday life brings to the light of the camera the words of the suppressed and the unrecognized. *A Tool of Resistance* is also a tribute to the tool used to record – the camera, because the video installation deals with the law proposed by the members of Israeli government in 2018, according to which filming, photographing or publishing footage of Israeli military activities in the West Bank would be a criminal offence, punishable by maximum 10 years in prison. By using a camera, a tool through which he also expresses himself artistically, the artist becomes an insider who empathizes with the citizens of the Palestinian town Hebron in the West Bank, putting himself in their place regardless of the potential danger it may bring.

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Vellahu, Batniji cultivates a documentary approach and secretly films in the area where filming is prohibited – in the transit zone between Egypt and Gaza, in the town Rafahu, the gate to the world for the Palestinians. The residents of Gaza share terrible stories about this crossing; humiliation by customs officers, whole days spent waiting without access to a toilet, extortion etc. The video is in fact a slide show where the artist contrasts black slides and photographic images united by the monotonous sound of the slides changing. *Just as precaution* (2015) is a participatory work. The audience is asked to photocopy their keys on the photocopier, and then the black and white photocopies are attached to the wall. The idea is that visitors leave their personal mark behind, once they leave the exhibition. Batniji has been occupied with the motif of the keys several times in his creative work, among others, for instance, in the work *Untitled* (2014) where he produced a glass copy of his keys and the pendant from Gaza, which he had to leave in 2006. As in *Untitled*, so in *Just as precaution* by being copied, the keys, symbols of home, lose their materialism and become fragile objects made of glass or mere copies.

Larissa Sansour is an artist who uses science fiction to bring a universal perspective to her work. Even when it deals with a particular theme, such as the Palestinian identity, for instance, the social

and political issues that the Palestinians face today, her short film *Nation Estate* (2012) not only ironizes all kinds of nationalism, but also deals with the issues of the development of technology and tourism, criticizing the globalized society in which we live. In that society the Palestinians have their own state in the shape of a skyscraper, where every storey represents a specific city or area in Palestine. The contrast between modern and traditional is interesting, which is achieved by placing different cities, such as Bethlehem or Jerusalem, in the cramped floors of a modern structure. Moreover, living in this region, it is impossible not to compare the small population of Palestine to the small fragmented nations formed in the territory of former Yugoslavia after its disintegration and not take the narrow architecture of skyscrapers as a unique metaphor for the feeling of geographic claustrophobia and closed borders.

Video works by **Sharif Waked**, in an absurdist manner, problematize politics, media propaganda, the issue of identity and violence. They are short and there is often a Sisyphian moment realized through the repetition of particular frames, motifs or sound, or through the prolongation of one single frame. *Moment No. 15 (Pa-Pa-Pa)* (2016) is a two-minute looping animation which is based on the claim by the right-wing Israeli criminologist and politician Anat Berko that the term Palestine is borrowed because Arabic does not have the "p" sound, which implies that there is no such thing as Palestine, that is, the Palestinians. *Bath time* (2012) in a humorous and provocative

way examines the question of identity by perverting the news from 2009, which was widely reported by the international media. Namely, an entrepreneur from Gaza, whose zoo had been badly damaged during the war, decided to transform two donkeys into zebras since the purchase and smuggling of the animals was too expensive. So Waked takes moments from the harsh reality that seem almost unbelievable or surreal and transforms them into metaphors in his video art. A donkey that has become a zebra and whose color is slowly coming off as water drops on its body, brings to mind the novel by the British writer Chris Cleave *The Other hand* (2008) which tells the story of Little Bee, a refugee from Nigeria who spent two years detained in a British immigration detention center. Since her name is Little Bee some characters in the story cannot be indifferent to her name when it is spoken and a paraphrase of one of the quotes from the novel would be that a free society is one in which everyone has the freedom to say their name out loud.

A documentary by **Jumana Manna** *A magical substance flows into me* (2015) which is shown as part of the accompanying program to the exhibition at the Yugoslav Film Archive, brings research and a spiritual journey of the artist where she explores the music of different ethnic and religious groups at the Jerusalem Archive of Music, and is inspired by the radio show by ethno-musicologist Robert Lachmann which has investigated music traditions in Palestine in the 1930s. The intimate atmosphere of the film brings interviews with various ethnic groups, and with

the artist's family, particularly with her father historian. Nationalisms and borders are overcome through music. Perhaps it is the only road to liberation, because through melody and tradition people open their souls, they can say their name without fear, and be who they are.

Lachmann moved from Berlin to Jerusalem in 1936, believing that the city would be a perfect place for an archive because of different people, different ethnic groups that had settled there for the religious significance of the city, and had brought along their traditions. The Jerusalem of that time can remind the inhabitants of these regions of prewar Sarajevo, where various ethnic groups lived side by side, and celebrated holidays of different religious affiliations. Neither Jerusalem nor Sarajevo of that time is anymore, and today's different political and sociological narratives are creating nationalisms that will (unfortunately) not be eradicated for generations and generations to come.

With this exhibition Hestia tries to get out of the comfort zone, to indicate the existence of nationalisms of parallel geographies – both distant and immediate. Parallel narratives include a few different stories in order to raise questions beyond the mainstream political narrative in a particular location, so that this question mark would bring at least a small step in the direction of healing a society.

Neva Lukić
Curator & Exhibitions manager

The particular aim of this exhibition is to rethink the double standards in the world today, Kosovo's independence echoes in my mind as a possible way for Palestine to obtain its not only a sovereignty as a state but also freedom - the basis of humanity. The acceptance/ recognition by all other nation states is something they both aspire to. Something that they still seem to be far from obtaining. Having grown up in Spain, this situation also makes me wonder about the fate of Catalonia and the Basque Country. Why do certain places have the support for their independence while others seem to never be able to achieve it – let alone be recognized. How does a country choose to recognize a certain territory as a state, and not recognize another one? What are the criteria for recognition? Finally, I must emphasize that this thinking is only driven by the realization that there are different approaches in global world politics today, and not by the conviction that certain people should or should not have their independence. My thinking is rather born of a desire to better understand things and wish for the same treatment by all and for all, bigger equality of terms and conditions.

Anja Obradović
Founder & Creative director

Artists' biographies:

Taysir Batniji studied Fine Art at Al Najah University in Nablus, Palestine and at the School of Arts in Bourges, France. In recent years he has participated held solo exhibitions at Mathaf (2022), MAC VAL (2021), Les Rencontres Internationales de

la Photographie, Arles (2018); Aperture Foundation, New York (2018); Contemporary Art Space André Malraux, Colmar (2016); Espace Culturel Robert de Lamanon, Colmar (2016); Cultural Center Salon de Provence, Marseille (2013); Musee d'Art et d'Histoire, Geneva (2007); and Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art, Rotterdam (2004). His works were shown in various group exhibitions. He participated in the Venice Biennale in 2011, 2009 and 2003. His works are part of prominent collections such as Center Georges Pompidou, Paris, Victoria & Albert. He was born in Gaza and lives and works between Paris and Palestine.

Jumana Manna received a BFA from the National Academy of Arts in Oslo and an MA in Aesthetics and Politics from California Institute of the Arts. She has participated in multiple festivals and exhibitions, including the BAFICI, IFFR Rotterdam, Tate Modern, Marrakech Biennale 6 and The Nordic Pavilion, 57th Venice Biennale. Manna was awarded the A.M. Qattan Foundation's Young Palestinian Artist Award in 2012, the Ars Viva Prize for Visual Arts and was nominated for the Preis der Nationalgalerie für junge Kunst in 2017. She was raised in Jerusalem and lives in Berlin.

Larissa Sansour works mainly with film, and also produces installations, photos and sculptures. In 2020, Sansour was the recipient of the Jarman award. Her work is shown in film festivals and museums worldwide amongst which, the Tate Modern, MoMA, Centre Pompidou and the Istanbul

Biennial. In 2019, Sansour represented Denmark at the 58th Venice Biennale. Her most recent solo shows include Copenhagen Contemporary in Denmark, EMST in Greece and Bildmuseet in Sweden. She lives and works in London in the UK, was born in Jerusalem and grew up in Bethlehem in Palestine.

Vangjush Vellahu's works have been exhibited at museums and art institutions which among others include: EMST National Museum of Contemporary Art Athens (2022); Manifesta 14th Biennial (2022); Art Quarter Budapest (2022); Times Art Center Berlin (2021); Radical Film Network Meeting Berlin (2021); Rencontres Internationales Paris/Berlin (2021); Almissa Contemporary Art Festival (2021); Museu d'Història de Catalunya Barcelona (2020); Zeta Contemporary Art Center Tirana (2020); Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art Rijeka (2019); Kunstquartier Bethanien Berlin (2019); Tranzit Cluj (2019); Škuc Gallery Ljubljana (2019); Hamburger Bahnhof Berlin (2018), etc. He was born in Pogradec, Albania, lives and works in Berlin and Tirana.

Sharif Waked has exhibited at museums and art venues including: the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Queens Museum of Art, New York; Macro al Mattatoio Museum, Rome; Mori Art Museum, Tokyo; Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Denmark; Singapore Art Museum; Musée Granet in Aix-en-Provence, France; Warsaw Museum of Modern Art, Poland; Jeu de Paume, Paris; Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris; Carrousel Du Louvre, Paris; Royal Academy

of Arts, London; KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin, etc. His work was shown at biennials such as the Sharjah Biennial 6 and 9, UAE, etc. He has shown work at different film festivals. Waked was born in Nazareth, and living in Palestine-Israel and the United States.

Visual material:

Taysir Batniji, *Just as a Precaution*, 2015, Participative work, 1 photocopier, 1 surface for hanging, A4 paper, fixation system, Courtesy of the artist and Sfeir-Semler Gallery Beirut / Hamburg

Larissa Sansour, *Nation Estate*, video, 9 minutes, 2012 (front page)

Vangjush Vellahu, *A Tool of Resistance*, 26 min 35 sec, 2020, two channel video installation, video, HD, color, sound

Sharif Waked, *Bath time*, 2012, video, 2 min and 12 sec (loop), 16:9, color, sound

Screenings: Jumana Manna, *A magical substance flows into me: 2/11/2022., 16/11/2022., 30/11/2022* at 7 pm., small hall, Yugoslav Film Archive, Uzun Mirkova 1

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