CAMP ⌜ EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

WE SHOUT

Khaled Barakeh
Gohar Dashti
Nermine Hammam

AND SHOUT,

Amel Ibrahimović
Alfredo Jaar
Sandra Johnston

BUT NO ONE LISTENS

Art from conflict zones

03.03 —
17.06
2017

Khaled Barakeh, from the series The Untitled Images (2014)
C-Digital print, 21 x 30 cm. Private collection, Germany.
The Chartwell Collection, New Zealand

“Six fucking years and everyone is only sitting and watching our continuous death live-streamed! Europe started calling it crisis only when refugees arrived at its shores while completely ignored the suffers of the people who remained under the siege of one of the worst dictators of our modern time.”

– Khaled Barakeh,
Facebook post, December 13, 2016

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“To suffer is one thing; another thing is living with the photographed images of suffering, which does not necessarily strengthen conscience and the ability to be compassionate… Once one has seen such images, one hast started down the road of seeing more and more… after repeated exposure to images (an event) becomes less real.”

– Susan Sontag,
On Photography, 1977

Introduction to
We shout and shout, but no one listens: Art from conflict zones

by Frederikke Hansen
& Tone Olaf Nielsen
CAMP’s directors

Part art exhibition, part discussion event, **We shout and shout, but no one listens: Art from conflict zones** brings together ten artists and thinkers from around the globe to explore the leading cause of displacement: war. Taking its starting point in a number of contemporary and recent conflicts that have been ignored by the international community, the exhibition presents installation, photography, painting, readymade, collage, and performance works that examine war from the perspective of those trapped in or fleeing zones of conflict. The discussion event accompanying the exhibition will debate what has caused indifference to certain of the world’s conflicts and victims, and what role visual representation plays in this.

Our contemporary world has been described as a site of global war with 42 active conflicts registered in 2014. Within the past five years alone, more than 15 conflicts have erupted or reignited across the globe, killing millions of people and producing massive internal and external displacement. News and media overflow with images and accounts of massacres, crimes against humanity, and genocide in war zones outside the West, yet Western politicians and citizens have increasingly become deaf to the cries for help and intervention. In Trampoline House, the refugee community center in which CAMP is situated, members continuously question why, for instance, the West has not intervened in Syria yet to stop the war crimes, why several conflicts on the African continent are made invisible, and why lives lost in Afghanistan or Iraq create less mourning and media attention than lives taken on Western soil?

The exhibition

The exhibition presents works that offer alternative visual accounts of The Syrian Conflict (2011-), The January 25 Revolution in Egypt (2011), The Bosnian War (1992-95), The Genocide in Rwanda (1994), The Iran-Iraq War (1980-88), and The Troubles in Northern Ireland (1968-98). The projects take viewers through a range of problematics relating to the experience, perception, and representation of war and its atrocities and trauma. They reflect critically on dilemmas connected with representing warfare and victims of war in times of mass and social media generated consumption of violence and suffering; on art's tendency to aestheticize the brutalities of war; on viewers' complicity and responsibility when consuming images of suffering without taking action; and on the 'mechanisms of differentiation' that make some human lives worthy of protection and saving and others not in times of war as well as in times of peace.

The contributing artists are Khaled Barakeh (Syria, based in Berlin), Gohar Dashti (Iran, based in Teheran), Nermine Hammam (Egypt, based in Cairo and London), Amel Ibrahimović (Bosnia-Herzegovina, based in Copenhagen and Kolding), Alfredo Jaar (Chile, based in New York), and Sandra Johnston (Northern Ireland, based in Belfast and Newcastle).

Discussion Event

The discussion event War images: How to show that black lives matter takes place two days after the exhibition opening, on March 5, 2017 in Trampoline House, and invites audiences to a full day of talks, performance, discussion, and workshops with thinkers and artists contributing to We shout and shout, but no one listens. The aim of the event is to discuss why in times of war (and peace!) some lives are protected and others are not, why some conflicts are silenced and others not? What role does media's portrayal of armed conflict play in this 'mechanism of differentiation,' and how can art offer alternative visual accounts of atrocity, conflict, and war that make black lives matter?

Social and news media are overflowing with images of armed conflict leaving many of us cold to the pains and terrors they represent. This coldness seems only in part to express a compassion fatigue resulting from the pictorial bombardment, or an apathy as a result of feeling powerless to stop wars. As American philosopher and gender theorist Judith Butler has argued, it is as if our capacity for empathy, compassion, and solidaric action in the West is being restrained to exclude some bodies and lives to begin with. How do images come into play in this framing, and how could we represent for instance the Syrian Conflict or the armed conflict in South Sudan so that the frailty of those bodies and the precariousness of those lives afflicted begin to matter to the West? It seems that there is a division between Western and non-Western lives. How do we undo this division? In art and in society?

The discussion event features a keynote by Achille Mbembe (Cameroon / South Africa), a performance by Sandra Johnston, a roundtable discussion with the artists contributing to the exhibition, and workshops with the individual artists.

Education & Practical Info

In addition to the artists and thinkers participating in the exhibition and the discussion event, Judith Butler is contributing with an essay on 'grievability' to this catalog. American visual culture theorist Nicholas Mirzoeff has also written a text to the publication on the politics of war representations.

The exhibition, its discussion event, education program, and publication are curated by CAMP's directors, Frederikke Hansen and Tone Olaf Nielsen. It makes up the fifth of six planned exhibitions in the two-year exhibition program Migration Politics, which up until now has traced artistic responses to refugee/migrant detention, forms of displacement, border politics, and forced deportation.

The exhibition is supported by:
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Alfredo Jaar, still from The Eyes of Gutete Emerita (1996)
New version: flash video and monitor, color, 1:36 min. Courtesy the artist

“We might think of war as dividing populations into those who are grievable and those who are not. An ungrievable life is one that cannot be mourned because it has never lived, that is, it has never counted as a life at all. We can see the division of the globe into grievable and ungrievable lives from the perspective of those who wage war in order to defend the lives of certain communities, and to defend them against the lives of others – even if it means taking those latter lives.”

– Judith Butler,
Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?, 2009

Grievability

by Judith Butler

Philosopher and gender theorist, Professor, Department of Comparative Literature and the Program of Critical Theory, University of California, Berkeley

Who mourns those who live in the zone of social death? In fact, I would answer, many people do, since the status of ungrievability is a contested one. Contesting the status of ungrievability, in fact, constitutes a form of resistance. I see this as a moment of transversal solidarity between those who are struggling against the violent annihilation and managed destitution of Black life as well as those who defend the claims of refugees against the racist logic of exclusion and expulsion throughout Europe. When a population is asserted and acknowledged as grievable, which is surely one meaning of “black lives matter” there is already a certain resistance to the neutralization or rationalization of both precarious life and devastating loss. So as we try to consider the forms of resistance to abandonment and death that happens in and by the border, we are compelled to find the specific forms in which grievability is asserted. Indeed, one question I hope to pose is: what counts as a militant assertion of grievability? What showing up and moving forward of the exposed and precarious body attests to the necropolitical conditions under which it seeks to live and resists those very conditions. How does the militant assertion of grievability operate in relation to resistance? It is this question that I hope to approach here. The full answer takes place, is taking place, will take place outside the context of this or any academic paper. But perhaps academic papers are there to register and respond to this very demand within the language that we have, or the language we now have to find.

The Demographics of Grievability

The abandonment of populations along the extended borders of Europe raises fundamental questions about when and where a population is designated as a set of lives deemed worthy of life. That question presupposes another, namely, whose lives are considered potentially grievable lives. For lives that do not count as potentially grievable stand very little chance of being safeguarded. We can ask what stops us from killing, but we can also ask what motivates us actively to find moral or political pathways that seek, where possible, to preserve life. Whether or not we pose such questions about individual others, specific groups, or all possible others matters greatly, since what we take for granted about the nature of individuals and groups, and even the ideas of humanity that we invoke in such discussions, very often demographic assumptions, including pervasive and lethal phantasies, about who counts as a human, which lives are worth preserving and which lives are not, and what defines and limits our operative notions of humanity.

“The abandonment of populations along the extended borders of Europe raises fundamental questions about when and where a population is designated as a set of lives deemed worthy of life. That question presupposes another, namely, whose lives are considered potentially grievable lives. For lives that do not count as potentially grievable stand very little chance of being safeguarded. We can ask what stops us from killing, but we can also ask what motivates us actively to find moral or political pathways that seek, where possible, to preserve life.”

I have suggested elsewhere that the category of grievable lives might be useful as we seek to elaborate an idea of the equal value of lives is compromised by the unequal distribution of grievability. To claim that equality formally extends to all humans is to sidestep the fundamental question of how the human is produced. We might say that for equality to make sense as a concept, it must imply that formal extension to all humans, but even then we make an assumption about who is included within the category of the human, and who is partially included, or fully excluded. Why should we restrict the concern for life to human life? For all these reasons, we cannot take the given notion of the human as the ground of our analysis: it is a concept differentially articulated in the context of inegalitarian forms of social and political power; the field of the human is constituted through basic exclusions, haunted by the figures that do not count in its tally. In effect, the unequal distribution of grievability enters into and distorts our deliberate ways of thinking about violence and nonviolence, but also our understanding of who is considered worthy of grief and whose life we wish to keep on living. One might expect that a consideration of grievability pertains only to those who are dead, but my contention is that grievability already operates in life, even at the very inception of human life; it is a characteristic attributed to living creatures, marking their value within a differential scheme of values, and bearing directly on the question of whether or not they are treated equally, and whether the world is organized in such a way to sustain life or abandon life, to foreclose or open a future, whether the presumption from the start is that this life, these lives, will be subject to early and violent death whereas others will be provided with what they need to survive and to flourish. But also, the sudden or gradual collapse of the world that necessitates flight, trusting the horrible stranger with a profit motive and a poorly crafted boat, being discovered by the Italian or Greek coastguard only to find that one is in a legal non-zone, facing the impossibility of transit, subjected to closed borders, unsanitary conditions, detention, the suspension of national and international rights, and the repeated question of how to survive, to move, and to arrive, and how to do all this with others who are historically and geographically caught in the same situation.

Amel Ibrahimović, My Refugee Shoes and My Refugee Clothes (1998)
Shoes and jacket placed in a corner, dimensions variable. Courtesy the artist

When one speaks about lives that are not equally grievable, one posits an ideal of equal grievability. There are at least two implications of this formulation that pose some critical problems. The first is that we have to ask whether there is a way to measure or calculate how much anyone is really grieved. How does one establish that one population is more grievable and that another is less? And are there degrees of grievability? Surely, it would be quite disturbing, if not fully counter-productive, to establish a calculus that could provide answers of this sort. So the only way to understand this claim that some are more grievable than others, that some are, within certain frames, and under certain circumstances, safeguarded against danger, destitution, and death more tenaciously than others, is to say precisely – with Derrida – that the incalculable value of a life is acknowledged in one setting and not in another, or that within the same setting (if we can set the setting) some are acknowledged as bearing incalculable value and others are subject to a calculation. To be subject to a calculation is already to have entered the grey zone of the ungrievable. The second implication of the formulation that not all lives are treated as equally grievable is that we have to revise our ideas of equality in order now to take into account grievability as a social attribute that ought to be subject to egalitarian standards. In other words, we are not yet speaking about equality if we have not yet spoken about equal grievability, or the equal attribution of grievability. Grievability is a necessary condition for equality.

“Of course, the attribution of grievability to a life presupposes that a life is regarded as a life. And sometimes when a population is regarded as ungrievable, it is first deprived of its status as a living population. If it is in some sense social dead, or if it has been subjected within and by a necropolitical episteme, it can hardly be grieved.”

Of course, the attribution of grievability to a life presupposes that a life is regarded as a life. And sometimes when a population is regarded as ungrievable, it is first deprived of its status as a living population. If it is in some sense social dead, or if it has been subjected within and by a necropolitical episteme, it can hardly be grieved. Only that which has been regarded as living can be grieved, can be considered as a lost life. A life that is already lost, or that was lost from the start, cannot be lost in any meaningful sense, and so cannot be grieved. And yet, as we know, the life that is lost from the start can be grieved, grieved precisely because it was, quite without knowing it, lost before it had a chance to live, and lived out all its chances as a form of perpetual loss.

So when we say that a life is ungrievable, we are not speaking only about a life that is already over. Indeed, to live in the world as a grievable life is to know that one's death would be mourned, could be mourned, to have a sense of living in a world in which one's life matters. But also, it is to know that this life will be safeguarded because of its value, that it will have the infrastructural ground it requires to live in a world with an open-ended future. To recognize the unequal distribution of the grievability of lives can and should transform our debates about both equality and violence. For equality and livability to become pervasive features of our world, they must be asserted and claimed by bodies who endeavor still to live, whose living endeavor becomes the very substance of protest.

"To recognize the unequal distribution of the grievability of lives can and should transform our debates about both equality and violence. For equality and livability to become pervasive features of our world, they must be asserted and claimed by bodies who endeavor still to live, whose living endeavor becomes the very substance of protest."

Nermine Hammam, from the series Upekkha (2011). Hahnemule Fine Art Pearl 285 gram, 90 x 60 cm. Courtesy the artist

Walls

by Nicholas Mirzoeff

Professor of Media, Culture and Communication,
New York University (NYU)

You are reading this on a wall.* Normally in art galleries, we pretend that the wall is not there, so that the 'white cube' can exist outside social space. This situation, where the exhibition is inside a refugee community center, is not normal. This exhibition is about the relationship of the visible and the invisible. It is not an abstract idea but a lived reality.

There are 60 million people in forced migration – refugees, if you will – more than there have been since the end of the Second World War. They flee war, drought, wars caused by drought and, everywhere, the men with guns. People are becoming refugees from their first refugee situation. And yet what we see are walls. Walls between countries. Walls around embassies. Walls concealing private houses. This is not a text. It is graffiti.

In 1989, what was then called 'The Wall,' the Berlin Wall, came down by citizen action. It seemed to be a turning point in world history, the end of a failed attempt by states to contain their peoples. But in 1994, the United States began constructing a wall on its southern border that now extends for a thousand kilometers. In 2000, the Israeli regime put up what is now a 700 kilometer wall, separating the Palestinians into militarized ghettoes controlled by checkpoints.

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* Nicholas Mirzoeff has written this essay to function as a wall text in the exhibition. We are reprinting it in this publication.

Here in Europe, the Eurostar train, designed to be a symbol of Britain's connection to Europe, enters France among miles of fences and razor wire. Spain's North African colony cities, Ceuta and Melilla huddle behind six meter walls. All across the Balkans and Greece, there are walls.

And in global cities from Buenos Aires to Johannesburg and Los Angeles, those who can afford to do so live behind walls in gated communities, all guarded by men with guns.

Yet those in power claim the West is in danger. For all their length, the walls appear to be invisible. So ingrained has the invisibility of the walls become that Trump was elected on the slogan "Build The Wall." As if there was not one already.

If the wall is a structure, it is really a structure of feeling. For the return to the medieval gated city is a symptom of fear not strength. Once, armies were feared. Now the West fears the very poor, huddled masses that the Statue of Liberty welcomes to New York. In Germany, they talk about the "wall in the mind" that continues to divide East and West. Perhaps there's a global wall in our minds and in front of our eyes.

The visual art in this exhibition tries to disrupt that invisibility. It asks its viewers to look again. It questions how to look, what it is that people let bounce off their eyes, what they do not see at all? Because you are here, you will be moved, perhaps angered. But we – that is you, gentle reader, and me – cannot ask too much of the artists.

It is not their job to stop what is happening or to make us aware of it. Perhaps they might make us think again about what we already know to have happened. And then to question who 'we' are and what we should do next.

Their work tries to counter the way that low-intensity counterinsurgency war is waged from the air. The US Army calls this 'command visualization.' It means they think they win if they can see you. Mostly people give this information away by the GPS in their cell-phone, by using a bank card, or

by posting to social media. Failing that, there is CCTV, video surveillance, everywhere. Or for those actively trying to be hard to find, there are drones.

Drones are essentially the guts of an iPhone and its camera on a long-distance flying platform with a bomb. The view of the world they present is literally and metaphorically flat. Because it is hard to tell people apart from the air, they now target SIM cards to bomb.

For those on the ground, drones are sometimes invisible but they are always audible because of their noisy propeller engines. This sound wages psychological warfare. Like all counterinsurgency, command visualization is about dominating minds.

Battlefield war is limited in scope, but counterinsurgency is global – GCOIN is the US Army acronym for it. Politics is now war by other means, to reverse the old saying. Including visual media.

In the last week of the British referendum campaign in June 2016 to decide whether the UK would remain in the European Union, the United Kingdom Independence Party released a poster. Under the banner headline "Breaking Point," all that could be seen was a long line of people walking, like the zombies that haunt Western cinema and TV.

By then everyone knew that such marches were really groups of refugees, trying to find shelter in Europe. The photographer Jeff Mitchell had intended to show how calmly the refugees were self-organizing in crossing Slovenia. By cropping the picture up close and adding the text, the meaning of the image was reversed so that it appeared to depict a threat.

Never displayed in public, this poster reached everyone in Britain with media access because of the wall-to-wall coverage it received (pun intended). So Britain voted to leave the Europe Union, as if to build a wall around itself, a collective denial of geography.

Pause.

To shelter behind names like Britain or the 'West' is to equivocate, to draw one's own wall. It is not an abstraction that is afraid. It is the collective mass of people who identify as white and who believe at a level so fundamental as to be beyond analysis or debate that this whiteness is superior. As African-American activist and writer W.E.B. Du Bois put it long ago, "whiteness is the ownership of the earth forever and ever, amen!"

To be sure, the eight men who own more wealth than half the world's population combined are all white (although Carlos Slim, the Mexican billionaire still might be denied entry to the United States). But for most people who think of themselves as white, this ownership is measured in other ways. Being able to access certain places, to move freely without being questioned. Like art galleries, for example.

With the installation of the Trump regime in the United States, "breaking point" has mutated into "America First." The pilot Charles Lindbergh, who advocated for this anti-semitic policy in the 1930s, wrote in a popular article that, "It is time to turn from our quarrels and to build our White ramparts again." The walls are not barriers. The wall is whiteness. Against that wall, people are dying.

4,579 people drowned on the Central Mediterranean route to Europe from Libya in 2016. The pictures are poorly sourced, often re-used, still terrible to see – but do you remember them? Alan Kurdi is remembered. Omran Daqneesh – the boy in the Aleppo ambulance, did you know his name? – to an extent. Brown and Black death doesn't sell at the moment. It's not that people have so-called 'compassion fatigue.' Rather, race divides even compassion.

Europeans used to think of race as an American problem.
What do you think?
What will you do when you leave this place?
Me, I'm trying to see better, maybe do better and – inevitably – fail better.

Gohar Dashti, from the series Today's Life and War (2008). 10 x photographs, 105 x 70 cm each. Courtesy the artist

Works & Projects in the Exhibition

Khaled Barakeh (Syria / Germany)

Regarding the Pain of Others (2013)
Wood, dimensions variable
Courtesy the artist

Regarding the Pain of Others (2013)

Visual artist and activist Khaled Barakeh was born in 1976 in Damascus, Syria, and has since 2010 been based in Germany; initially in Frankfurt and since 2016 in Berlin. He contributes with the installation Regarding the Pain of Others (2013) and the photographic series The Untitled Images (2014). Both works respond to a realization by the artist now living in Europe that people around him were becoming immune to the daily suffering of Syrians at war.

Regarding the Pain of Others is an installation made of carefully arranged parts of a na'ash. A na'ash is a wooden stretcher or open coffin used to carry dead bodies from the mosque to the cemetery. This particular stretcher had carried 135 bodies to their grave during the Syrian Conflict before the artist had it smuggled out of Syria. In Germany, Barakeh took the stretcher apart and transformed it into an overturned throne surrounded by leftover wood, sawdust, and rusty nails.

The excess material functions as a testament to the dead bodies that have touched it, reminding audiences in the West that they are not only looking at a symbolic representation of war casualties, but at parts that carry real traces of people having lost their lives during the Syrian Conflict. The throne, on the other hand, becomes an image of the power of the people, who come together in funeral processions to mourn the dead and collectively demonstrate their rage against the Syrian regime.

By referencing American writer Susan Sontag's famous book on war photography Regarding the Pain of Others (2003) in its title, the installation asks of its western audiences in particular to contemplate why humankind is fascinated by images of suffering, what is means to be a spectator of other people's wars, and if images of atrocities in faraway conflict zones mobilize you to act or numb you?

– Frederikke Hansen & Tone Olaf Nielsen

Khaled Barakeh (Syria / Germany)

The Untitled Images (2014)
C-Digital prints, 21 x 30 cm each
Private collection, Germany.
The Chartwell Collection, New Zealand

The Untitled Images is a series of five color photographs of devastated adults holding the dead bodies of child war victims in their arms. By using a scalpel, however, Barakeh has with the precision of a surgeon carefully peeled away the top layer of those areas of the photographs representing the child corpses, thereby leaving a blind spot, a real wound in each photo.

Unlike representations of war and death in western media – which reduce victims to abstract numbers and circulate so many images of suffering that we become indifferent to them – Barakeh's method of peeling away the representation of the dead children is able to convey what war really feels like. Paradoxically by not allowing the viewer to see the corpses, the artist makes the loss and pain tangible while at the same time protecting the dead children from voyeuristic views and mass media's exploitative 'spectacle of violence and suffering.'

Images like these are dangerous to the power institutions that wage wars. They make us doubt that the wars we fight are just and legitimate, and open up possibilities for the formation of anti-war movements.

Common to both of the works that Barakeh is contributing with is a refusal to feed us with images of dead bodies. It is by their absence that the artist achieves the paradoxical effect of making the victims really present and perceptible to us.

– Frederikke Hansen & Tone Olaf Nielsen

The Untitled Images (2014)

Born in 1976 in Damascus Suburb, and currently based in Berlin, Khaled Barakeh graduated from the Faculty of Fine Arts in Damascus, Syria, in 2005, and completed his MFA at Funen Art Academy in Odense, Denmark, in 2010. He has exhibited at the Künstlerhaus Stuttgart; Salt in Istanbul; Shanghai Biennale; Kunsthalle Brandts in Denmark; Frankfurter Kunstverein; Artspace in New Zealand and many other institutions. In 2013, Barakeh finished his Meisterschueler with Professor Simon Starling at the Städelschule Art Academy in Frankfurt am Main.

The Untitled Images (2014)

Gohar Dashti (Iran)

Today's Life and War (2008)
10 x photographs, 105 x 70 cm each
Courtesy the artist

Tehran-based artist and photographer Gohar Dashti was born in 1980 in Ahvaz, Iran, the same year that the eight year long Iran-Iraq war broke out and one year after the Islamic Revolution. She contributes with her photo series Today's Life and War from 2008, which has emerged from her experiences during the war.

The series examines war's impact on the emotional life of her generation and how war and its legacy keep affecting all aspects of contemporary society. In ten color photographs, a couple go about their daily life: typing away on a laptop, making a call on the cell phone during a shared meal, hanging the laundry out to dry, and going for a walk arm in arm. The images become unsettling when the viewer realizes that these activities unfold in the middle of a battlefield film set with fighting soldiers, military tanks, razor wire, and bomb shelters.

Today's Life and War shows war's all-pervading force across space and time: how war lives on in the postwar present as a traumatic memory and as a backdrop for all aspects of life. It suggests to the viewer that war must be understood both as total destruction and as producing new notions of self, home, family, society, memory, and history.

– Frederikke Hansen & Tone Olaf Nielsen

Today's Life and War (2008)

Gohar Dashti received her MA in Photography from the Fine Art University of Tehran in 2005. After her graduation, she has spent the last 12 years making social issues with particular reference to history and culture, anthropology and sociology the main focus of her practice. Dashti tries with her own means to express the world around her. Her starting point is always her surroundings, her memory, through her personal perception of things. She aims to trace her relationship to society and the world in a very sensitive way. Her practice continuously develops from life events and connections between the personal and the universal, the political and the imagined. Dashti has been awarded several art residencies and scholarships such as the MacDowell Colony Award (Peterborough, 2017), DAAD Award (Berlin, 2009–2011), Visiting Arts (Bradford/London, 2009), and International Arts & Artists (Washington DC, 2008). She has participated in numerous museum exhibitions, festivals, and biennales around the world, and her works have been included in many collections, including Victoria and Albert Museum (London), Mori Art Museum (Tokyo), Museum of Fine Arts (Boston), Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art (Kansas City), National Gallery of Art (Washington DC), and Kadist Art Foundation (Paris).

Today's Life and War (2008)

Today's Life and War (2008)

Nermine Hammam (Egypt / UK)

Upekkha (2011)
4 x prints on Hahnemule Fine Art Pearl 285 gram,
90 x 50 cm, 90 x 60 cm, 90 x 60 cm & 60 x 60 cm
Courtesy the artist

Upekkha (2011)

Photo artist Nermine Hammam contributes with a selection from two different series that take their point of departure in the 2011 Egyptian revolution and its aftermath. Upekkha is a series of photographic prints from 2011. The artist writes about the work:

“During Egypt’s January Revolution we heard with apprehension that the army was on its way. This mythical force was leaving its barracks in the desert and joining citizens on Tahrir Square. And then they came, descending upon us in the square, cumbersome tanks screeching through Cairo’s desolate streets where, only days before, there had been bustle and congestion.

But as the hatches opened, and doors of military vehicles were thrown wide, what emerged was not the angry stereotypes of power and masculinity we expected, but wide-eyed youths with tiny frames, squinting at the cacophony of Cairo. Watching these young soldiers in ill-fitting army fatigues, astride incongruous military hardware, I wondered: What is power and who, ultimately, wields it? Then it dawned on me: Power is a myth, a construct. It resides only in the images that we hold of it. What transforms wide-eyed youths into the loaded symbol of the army is a carefully choreographed performance of uniforms and equipment, a united display of force.

In photographing the soldiers, unwittingly the individual was reclaimed from the group, ‘re-personalizing’ the ‘de-personalized’ and unmasking the spectacle. Individual soldiers were caught in unguarded moments, laying down their display of power, young and vulnerable amidst their gadgetry.

After seeing these protagonists, so young, innocent and de-masculinized, I felt an urge to parody propaganda posters from the 1940s and 1950s that feature strong nubile men and women in idealized settings. During the 18 days of revolution the army seemed inactive, observers of the scene before them. Military power appeared to me disarmed by the indomitable power of peaceful confrontation. The backgrounds emphasize the discordant presence of armed men among civilians in Tahrir: men of war in Paradise.

I have often wondered if photography offers the power to see behind the mask. Does it seek to destabilize, picking up that which should be seen and that which must remain hidden? Was the very act of photographing soldiers an inversion of traditional hierarchies of power? As a woman, I zoomed into this masculine sphere from which I am traditionally excluded. To photograph the soldiers was to present the possibility of them as young and vulnerable, desiring and desired. Social upheaval requires us to consider the coquettish smile of a soldier in khaki, the precariousness of paradisiacal landscape. We must work out how to fear and admire, fight off and channel, mock and respect the terrible frailty of power.”

– Nermine Hammam

Upekkha (2011)

Nermine Hammam (Egypt / UK)

Unfolding (2012)
Rice paper 100 gram – Alpha Cellulose White,
26 x 53 cm, 25 x 53 cm, 40 x 83 cm, 19 x 25 cm & 37 x 52 cm
Courtesy the artist

Hitch-Hiking from the series Unfolding (2012)

"Unfolding (2012) is a series of images depicting stylized Japanese landscapes intersected with explicit footage of police and army brutality following Egypt's 2011 Revolution. Inspired by 17th and 18th century Japanese screens, the work is printed on rice paper. The photographic material was not captured by myself but by Egyptian citizens in the months following the revolution. Immediately recognizable to Egyptians, these images have acquired an iconic status, becoming symbols of the waning revolutionary ideals.

The concept originally evolved from a personal experience where I witnessed young Egyptian protesters losing their lives in Tahrir Square, while less than one kilometer away, city life progressed undisturbed. The experience affected me in ways I couldn't really find an appropriate name for. Many around me referred to it as the 'twilight zone,' a place where little sense can be found, where the expectations that structure everyday life oscillate between the absurd, the nauseating, and the necessary.

Parodying the human urge 'not to see,' I beautified these scenes of brutality, suspending images of unrestrained violence against unarmed civilians within aesthetically pleasing and highly stylized landscapes. In the foreground we see only the beauty of this utopian setting, but peering through the undergrowth, we are unexpectedly confronted by horror.

In this work I question our ability to blind ourselves to violence through distance and perspective. I try to probe the power of the mass media to entirely detach us from horror through the endless replication of imagery. It is the very act of creating iconic images that desensitizes us from the original violence that it depicts. When someone actually dies, they only die once before the feeling of loss makes room for mourning. When they die on camera, their death is distorted in the endless loop of infotainment. It is precisely this iconic immortality that we cannot deal with very well. Images on repeat build our emotional immunity up, a shell that threatens to cut us off from our humanity, our capacity for empathy. And so, we must look away, or stare unending pain in the eye and become monsters.

Japanese screens allowed me to play around with these uneasy feelings. How could we represent nauseating violence without rendering it toothless? Was there a way of depicting violence without making pornography? Violence had to be hinted rather than divulged. Respect demanded that instant gratification be neutralized. It must take some effort of the gaze for the viewer to realize the actual horror of the situation beyond the placid surface, to fully absorb the brunt of the shock. The censoring of the screens eroticizes the violence; it saves these images from the banal pornography of their daily circulation. Paradoxically, it redeems their power by neutralizing the usual knee-jerk reactions of empathy that immediately deplete these images of their capacity to move us. This ambiguous politeness of art keeps the pain of reality alive. They remind us that perhaps we should set aside our antiquated notions of realism and photojournalistic accountability; that some forms of artful, artificial representation remain the only way to portray violence without sadistically violating the victims that we focus upon."

– Nermine Hammam

Codes of My Kin from the series Unfolding (2012)

Hibiscus from the series Unfolding (2012)

The Camel's Flight from the series Unfolding (2012)

Press from the series Unfolding (2012)

Born in Egypt (1967), Nermine Hammam is an Egyptian photo artist, living and working between Cairo and London. As an artist, she photographs the world and then alters the images she captures: her works are intricate composites of layered images and symbols, transformed through the prism of an aesthetic that combines digital manipulation and painting to form a rich and highly personal tapestry. Hammam obtained her BFA in filmmaking from New York University's Tisch School of Arts, going on to work with Simon & Goodman and renowned film director Youssef Chahine. In her images, Hammam seeks out individuals in states of abandonment, marginalization, or altered states of consciousness, relentlessly uncovering the vulnerability behind the mask, the frailty behind the gun, and the hidden power structures within the family unit. Her work is widely exhibited and as been included in public and private collections around the world. This includes international biennales such as the Bamako Biennale of Photography (Mali, 2011), X Biennale (Cuenca, Ecuador, 2009), and Photo Biennale Thessaloniki (2009).

Amel Ibrahimović (Bosnia-Herzegovina / Denmark)

My Refugee Shoes and My Refugee Clothes (1998)
Shoes and jacket placed in a corner, dimensions variable
Courtesy the artist

Visual artist Amel Ibrahimović was born in 1977 in Bosnia-Herzegovina and is based in Copenhagen and Kolding. Ibrahimović is invited to contribute with his installation My Refugee Shoes and My Refugee Clothes from 1998. The installation belongs to a body of work that examines how memory and the historical context of a place influence the way in which individuals and society relate to the world.

My Refugee Shoes and My Refugee Clothes is a readymade, a work of art made from manufactured objects, which consists of the teenage shoes and jacket that the artist wore in 1992 when he fled across the border from Bosnia to Croatia. The clothes are simply placed in the corner of the exhibition space and with this readymade format, Ibrahimović is able to capture the urgency of war: the work represents the moment when everyday life is brutally interrupted by a conflict, a disaster, or a crisis so violent that you have no time to pack anything except the clothes on your back. The absence of the body in the installation simultaneously shows what happens to your identity when you flee: life as you know it stops, you are stripped of your different identities – 'teenager,' 'son,' 'Bosnian,' 'student,' 'friend'... – and reduced to one: 'refugee.'

At a micro level, the work speaks of the fact that people remember their own past selectively, which can result in the dual forgetting of oneself and the collective history to which one belongs. At a macro level, this forgetting allows for repetition: the periodic historical recurrence of violent conflict, mass killing, forced migration, inhospitable resettlement, and xenophobic retort. For each new repetition, the last instance has been forgotten, as if the past is incapable of instructing the present. (– Sarah Lookofsky)

– Frederikke Hansen & Tone Olaf Nielsen

Amel Ibrahimović studied at the Funen Art Academy in Odense, Denmark, and Städelschule/Hochschule für Bildende Künste in Frankfurt. He has been working with NIFCA (Helsinki), Art Workshop Lazareti (Dubrovnik), and Overgaden Institute of Contemporary Art (Copenhagen). In 2014, he was awarded the Danish Akademiraadets Præmiefond. In 2015, he was appointed professor at the Jutland Art Academy in Aarhus, Denmark, and in 2016, he received a working grant from the Danish Arts Foundation. His work is represented in public collections such as KUNSTEN Museum of Modern Art Aalborg (Denmark) and the CCA Andratx (Mallorca).

Alfredo Jaar (Chile / USA)

The Eyes of Gutete Emerita (1996)
New version: flash video and monitor, color, 1:36 min.
Courtesy the artist

Artist, architect, and filmmaker Alfredo Jaar was born in 1956 in Santiago, Chile and has since 1982 lived and worked in New York City. Jaar contributes to the exhibition with his video installation The Eyes of Gutete Emerita from 1996, part of a large body of works responding to the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda, a result of what the artist has called the "criminal indifference of the world community" to the human tragedy unfolding during the genocide.

The video installation tells the personal story of a survivor called Gutete Emerita. She witnessed her husband and two sons being killed with machetes right in front of her eyes, but managed herself to escape with her daughter Marie Louise Umanarunga. The 1:36 min. long video consists of a sequence of three text stills recounting facts about the genocide and Emerita's story. At the very end of the video, a close up of Emerita's eyes fills the entire screen for just a split second.

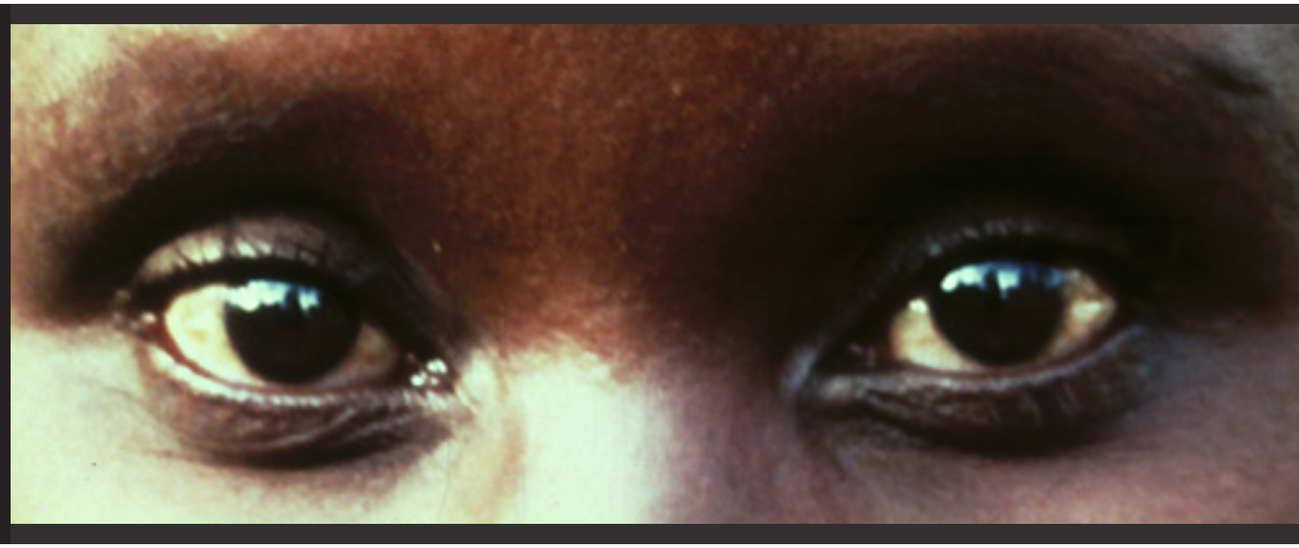
In these contemporary times, when the world community is turning a blind eye to a large number of disastrous wars and conflicts, Jaar's work offers an opportunity to confront this collective indifference head-on. Instead of showing images of some of the one million people who were killed during the genocide, the work zooms in on one witness to the brutalities and makes us to look directly into Emerita's eyes.

In that moment, the distance we often feel to media representations of victims of conflict collapses. This strategy of proximity allows the viewer to indirectly see what atrocities Emerita witnessed, and to identify with her traumatizing experience and loss. According to Jaar, such a process of identification is fundamental to create empathy, solidarity, intellectual involvement, and – one could add – action.

– Viktoria Troeltzsch Larsen & Tone Olaf Nielsen

Alfredo Jaar is an artist, architect, and filmmaker who lives and works in New York City. He was born in Santiago de Chile. Jaar's work has been shown extensively around the world. He has participated in the Biennales of Venice (1986, 2007, 2009, 2013), Sao Paulo (1987, 1989, 2010) as well as Documenta in Kassel (1987, 2002). Important individual exhibitions include The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York; Whitechapel, London; The Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; The Museum of Contemporary Art, Rome; and Moderna Museet, Stockholm. Major recent surveys of his work have taken place at Musée des Beaux Arts, Lausanne; Hangar Bicocca, Milan; Alte Nationalgalerie, Berlinische Galerie and Neue Gesellschaft fur bildende Kunst e.V., Berlin; Rencontres d'Arles, Arles; and Kiasma, Helsinki. Jaar has realized more than sixty public interventions around the world. Over fifty monographic publications have been published about his work. He became a Guggenheim Fellow in 1985 and a MacArthur Fellow in 2000. His work can be found in the collections of The Museum of Modern Art and Guggenheim Museum in New York, the MCA in Chicago, MOCA and LACMA in Los Angeles, the Tate in London, the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, the Centro Reina Sofia in Madrid, the Moderna Museet in Stockholm, the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Humlebæk, and dozens of other institutions and private collection.


The eyes of Gutete Emerita.



Sandra Johnston

(Northern Ireland)

To the Day (2017)
2-part performance
commissioned by CAMP
Courtesy the artist

Sandra Johnston was born in 1968 in County Down, Northern Ireland and is a performance artist who creates performances that are responsive to places and spaces over which people disagree or fight. She uses performance to investigate vulnerability and trauma in relation to space and how collective memory of a location can sometimes change after a violent event has happened so that some people are being marked as disgraceful while others are being respectfully remembered.

Based on her artistic research as well as her personal experience of armed conflict and militarization in Northern Ireland, Johnston is invited to create a new performance in two parts for the opening night of the exhibition on March 3 and for the following discussion event on March 5. The performance piece will address how war destructs and reshapes social spaces and identities with a special focus on women living in zones of militarization or war.

– Frederikke Hansen & Tone Olaf Nielsen

Sandra Johnston is a visual artist from Northern Ireland, working predominantly in areas of site-responsive performance art and installation. Johnston's processes often explore the potential for creative interaction within 'contested spaces,' relating to the aftermath of trauma and acts of commemoration that exist as forms of testimony or empathetic encounter. Currently, Course Leader of the MFA at Northumbria University in England, she has held several teaching and research posts since 2002, including an AHRC Research Fellowship at the University of Ulster, Belfast, investigating issues of 'Trauma of Place' and as Guest Professor at the Bauhaus University, Weimar. In 2013, this research was published in a book entitled Beyond Reasonable Doubt: An Investigation of Doubt, Risk and Testimony Through Performance Art Processes in Relation to Systems of Legal Justice.

DIFFERENCE FOSTERED (2016). Collaborative performance with Dominic Thorpe as part of Future Histories, a project marking the Centenary of Ireland's 1916 Easter Rising, commissioned by Níamh Murphy and Áine Phillips (Performance Art Live Foundation Ireland) Kilmainham Gaol, Dublin. Photo: Joseph Carr

WHICHEVER SILENCE YOU CHOOSE TO FILL (2016).
Solo performance, 4 hours, commissioned by Steakhouse Live, ARTSADMIN, London. Photo: Manuel Vason

Events & Education Program

OPENING PARTY
We shout and shout, but no one listens: Art from conflict zones
Friday, March 3, 2017, 6 pm–12 am, in CAMP

Opening Program
6–6:30 Welcome speeches and drinks
6:30–7:30 Community dinner and exhibition viewing
7:30–8:15 To the Day / performance by Sandra Johnston (Northern Ireland) exploring the trauma of contested spaces
8:30–12 Dance party / with DJ Goody and Panteras DJ Crew (transnational)

GUIDED TOURS
Saturdays, 3–4 pm, from March 4 – June 17, 2017 , in CAMP
(closed last Saturday of the month)

Every Saturday, CAMP invites you to a free guided tour in We shout and shout, but no one listens: Art from conflict zones. Each tour is conducted by a duo made up of a non-refugee intern from CAMP and a refugee volunteer from Trampoline House. The tours are conducted in English.

DISCUSSION EVENT
War images: How to show that black lives matter
Sunday, March 5, 2017, 1–7 pm, in Trampoline House

1–1:15 Welcome / by Frederikke Hansen and Tone Olaf Nielsen (directors of CAMP)
1:15–2 Keynote / by Achille Mbembe (philosopher and political theorist, Cameroon, based in Johannesburg)
2–2:45 Performance / by Sandra Johnston (artist, Northern Ireland, based in Belfast and Newcastle) followed by Q & A session
2:45–3:15 Coffee and snack break
3:15–4:45 Roundtable discussion / with Khaled Barakeh (artist, Syria, based in Berlin), Gohar Dashti (artist, Iran, based in Teheran), Nermine Hammam (artist, Egypt, based in Cairo and London), Amel Ibrahimović (artist, Bosnia-Herzegovina, based in Copenhagen), and Sandra Johnston (artist, Northern Ireland, based in Belfast and Newcastle)
4:45–5 Coffee and snack break
5–5:45 Workshops / with the artists
5:45–6:15 Closing discussion
6:15–7 Community dinner

Moderator: Mathias Danbolt (art historian and critic, Norway, based in Copenhagen)

The event is conducted in English (with simultaneous interpretation to Farsi and Arabic). All are welcome. Free admission

Sandra Johnston, WHICHEVER SILENCE YOU CHOOSE TO FILL (2016)
Solo performance, 4 hours, commissioned by Steakhouse Live, ARTSADMIN, London. Photo: Manuel Vason

About CAMP

CAMP / Center for Art on Migration Politics is a nonprofit exhibition venue for art discussing questions of displacement, migration, immigration, and asylum. The center is located in Trampoline House, an independent community center in Copenhagen's northwest district that provides refugees and asylum seekers in Denmark with a place of support, community, and purpose. CAMP produces exhibitions on displacement and migration with renowned international artists as well as less established practitioners, prioritizing artists with refugee or migrant experience.

CAMP takes its point of departure in the fact that more people than ever before are displaced from their homes because of climate change, war, conflict, persecution, and poverty. The center works to increase insight into the life situations of displaced and migrant persons, and to discuss these in relation to the overall factors that cause displacement and migration. The objective is, through art, to stimulate greater understanding between displaced people and the communities that receive them, and to stimulate new visions for a more inclusive and equitable migration, refugee, and asylum policy.

CAMP is intended to be a platform for artists, whose work represents displaced and migrating people's experiences and sheds light on the struggles that refugees, asylum seekers, undocumented migrants, trafficked, and enslaved people fight every day. We aim for CAMP to be a space where audiences, both with and without refugee or migrant backgrounds, are able to identify with the living conditions of displaced peoples through art and find inspiration for an alternative refugee, asylum, and migration political agenda.

CAMP's name refers to the nation-state's perhaps most extreme responses to human migration: the refugee camp, the asylum center, and the detention center. CAMP is the first center of its kind in Scandinavia and is directed as a self-governing institution by Danish curators Frederikke Hansen and Tone Olaf Nielsen, who also founded the center in 2015.

CAMP is realized with support from private sponsors and:
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www
campcph.org
facebook.com/campcph/
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About the Trampoline House location

Trampoline House: Copenhagen Refugee Community is an independent community center in Copenhagen that provides refugees and asylum seekers in Denmark with a place of support, community, and purpose. Four days a week, the house offers different classes and activities, legal counseling, and friendship with the aim of breaking the social isolation and sense of powerlessness that many refugees and asylum seekers experience, while waiting months and years in the Danish asylum centers for a response to their asylum or for their deportation. Trampoline House brings together asylum seekers and Danish citizens, refugees and other residents of Denmark, united by a desire to improve the conditions for asylum seekers and refugees.

Trampoline House is a self-governing institution with a board of directors, a paid staff of five, and a large group of interns and volunteers. Financial support comes from public and private funding, support events and donations. It was formed in 2009–2010 by artists Morten Goll and Joachim Hamou and curator Tone Olaf Nielsen in collaboration with a large group of asylum seekers, art students, activists, and professionals in reaction to the way in which the Danish state treats asylum seekers and refugees.

www
trampolinehouse.dk
facebook.com/trampolinhuset
facebook.com/groups/134600380053

Essay & Discussion Event Contributors

Judith Butler (born 1956 in Cleveland, Ohio, based in Berkeley, USA) is an American philosopher and gender theorist whose work has influenced political philosophy, ethics, and the fields of feminist, queer, and literary theory. She is invited to contribute with a short essay on the 'mechanisms of differentiation' that make some human lives worthy of protection and others not in times of war as well as in times of peace. Since 1993, Butler has taught at the University of California, Berkeley, where she is now Maxine Elliot Professor in the Department of Comparative Literature and the Program of Critical Theory. She is also the Hannah Arendt Chair at the European Graduate School. Butler is active in gender and sexual politics and human rights, anti- war politics, and serves on the advisory board of Jewish Voice for Peace. She is best known for her books Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (1990), Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex" (1993), Excitable Speech (1997), Precarious Life: Powers of Violence and Mourning (2004), Undoing Gender (2004), and Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable? (2009).

Mathias Danbolt is an art historian and critic with a special focus on queer, antiracist, and decolonial perspectives on contemporary art and performance. His current research addresses the effects and affects of Danish colonialism within the field of art and culture. Danbolt is Assistant Professor of Art History at University of Copenhagen.

Achille Mbembe (born 1957 in Otélé, Cameroon, based in Johannesburg, South Africa) is a philosopher, political scientist, and public intellectual. He obtained his Ph.D in History at the Sorbonne in Paris in 1989 and a D.E.A. in Political Science at the Institut d'Etudes Politiques (Paris). He is a Research Professor of History and Politics at the Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research in Johannesburg, South Africa, and a Visiting Professor in the Department of Romance Studies at the Franklin Humanities Institute, Duke University. He has also held appointments at Columbia University, Berkeley, Yale University, the University of California, and Harvard University. Mbembe's research interests lie in the social sciences and African history and politics. More precisely, he investigates the 'postcolony' that comes after decolonization. Mbembe's most important works are: Les jeunes et l'ordre politique en Afrique noire (1985); La naissance du maquis dans le Sud- Cameroun (1920-1960); Histoire des usages de la raison en colonie (1996); De la postcolonie. Essai sur l'imagination politique dans l'Afrique contemporaine (On the Postcolony) (2000); Sortir de la grande nuit : Essai sur l'Afrique décolonisée (2003); Critique de la raison nègre (2013).

Nicholas Mirzoeff is Professor of Media, Culture and Communication at New York University (NYU). His most recent book How To See The World (2015) was a New Scientist Top Ten Book of the Year. His writing has been published in the Guardian, the New York Times, The New Republic, and elsewhere. He is working on an e-book on the Black Lives Matter movement, to be distributed free by ICA Miami. He lives in New York City.

Colofon

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CAMP
Center for Art on Migration Politics

Nermine Hammam, Hibiscus from the Unfolding series (2012). Rice paper 100 gram – Alpha Cellulose White, 26 x 53 cm. Courtesy the artist

Visit

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Hours

Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday 1–6 pm
Saturday 2–5 pm
Free guided tours Saturday 3–4 pm
Closed every last Friday and Saturday of the month

Admission

Free admission with a suggested donation of DKK 20 / €3 / $3

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