

secession

Vereinigung bildender KünstlerInnen Wiener Secession
Friedrichstraße 12, A-1010 Wien
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Press release

Lawrence Abu Hamdan ***Green Coconuts and Other Inadmissible Evidence*** December 8, 2020 – February 7, 2021 Galerie

In both his art and his audio investigations, Lawrence Abu Hamdan grapples with sound, speech, memory, and the quest for truth in the context of today's legal and humanitarian crises. A central concern that is woven through many of his works, including sound and video installations, objects, and research-based documentaries, is his engagement with questions around the relevance and critique of acoustic clues and the reports of earwitnesses as part of the gathering of evidence in legal proceedings. In his exhibition at the Secession, the artist takes these concerns a step further. He presents altogether four works from two series that probe questions related to the witness testimony. The display takes a stand for other forms of witnessing that break the juridical framework for eye- and earwitnesses' statements and perhaps pose a more general challenge to our notions of law and justice, of truth and how it is established.

The audiovisual installation *After SFX* (2018) developed out of an inquiry conducted in cooperation with Amnesty International and Forensic Architecture in 2016 into the Syrian torture prison Saydnaya. Abu Hamdan interviewed former inmates and worked with them to compile a sound archive of the prison that would allow for inferences concerning its architecture, the conditions of detention, the number of prisoners, etc.

This project fundamentally changed his understanding of the complexity of memory and witnessing and gave him the conceptual tools that allowed him to make his subsequent body of work dealing with the testimony of reincarnated subjects.

The first in this series is *Once Removed* (2019). The two-channel video installation shows the artist in conversation with the young historian Bassel Abi Chahine about the latter's extensive archive. His obsessive analysis and unprecedented research into the Lebanese People's Liberation Army was done in pursuit of material to reconstitute flashbacks and unexplainable memories from a previous life. In his past incarnation, he was Yousef Fouad Al Jawhary, a soldier who died during a combat mission at the age of sixteen in 1984. Though Bassel has many memories of his life as Yousef, he has no sense of what he looked like.

The related second piece, the video *A Speculative Portrait (for a boy who returned without his face)* (2020) illustrates an attempt at facial reconstruction: the production of an image based on a childhood photograph of what Al Jawhary might have looked like as a young adult. The technique is normally used to sketch the likely current appearance of people who have been missing for a long time.

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For the Otherwise Unaccounted (2020) is a series of prints from which Abu Hamdan drew on Dr. Ian Stevenson's 1997 book *Reincarnation and Biology: The Etiology of Birthmarks*, a collection of cases from all over the world in which birthmarks correspond to the ways in which subjects died in their previous lives. The raised ink renderings of these birthmarks highlight the ways in which testimony is stored in the body of people for whom injustices and violence have otherwise escaped the historical record due to colonial subjugation, corruption, rural lawlessness and legal amnesty.

The works in the exhibition propose a different perspective on the concepts of witnessing, evidence, and the production of truth, which requires a different kind of listening as well. The artist characterizes the presentation's intention as follows: "The exhibition as a whole is developing specific formal and aesthetic strategies to produce conditions for listening to new kinds of testimony. Testimony that sits awkwardly in the forums we conventionally designate for the production of truth and history."

Lawrence Abu Hamdan was born in Amman, Jordan, in 1985 and currently lives and works in Dubai (UAE).

The exhibition program is conceived by the board of the Secession.
Curator: Bettina Spörr

Lawrence Abu Hamdan's work is supported by Alserkal Arts Foundation.

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Artist's book

Lawrence Abu Hamdan

Format: 15 x 22 cm

Details: Soft cover, adhesive binding, 232 pages (including 58 foldouts)

Concept: Lawrence Abu Hamdan

Texts: excerpts from various sources

ca. 60 illustrations

Secession 2020

Distribution: Revolver Publishing

€ 26,40

The ninety-six objects in this inventory are sourced from earwitness interviews Lawrence Abu Hamdan conducted as well as from trial transcripts across the globe. *After SFX* explores the ways we remember sound and the ways in which cinematic sound effects have created a collective acoustic unconscious. What is revealed is our difficulty in describing these memories when precision is vital. The objects listed here stand in for a missing sonic vocabulary, a language we do not yet speak.

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Press images

Installation views are available for download at <https://www.secession.at/en/presstype/aktuell/>

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Lawrence Abu Hamdan. *Green Coconuts and Other Inadmissible Evidence* Galerie

Ausstellungsdauer	December 8, 2020 – February 7, 2021
Artist's book	<i>Lawrence Abu Hamdan</i> , 232 pages, € 26,40
Opening hours	Tuesday – Sunday 2 – 6 p.m.
Permanent Presentation	Gustav Klimt, <i>Beethoven Frieze</i> ; <i>Beethoven – Painting and Music</i> in cooperation with the Wiener Symphoniker
Guided tours	Every Saturday at 2 p.m. in German, free of charge (without registration)
Admission	Adults € 9,50 / Pupils, students and senior citizens € 6,-
Youtube	www.youtube.com/channel/UCllinc_V3Uz4C5Ucrb4DtSw
Instagram	www.instagram.com/viennasecession/
Facebook	www.facebook.com/SecessionWien/
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