

HEBA Y. AMIN /

b. Cairo, Egypt 1980

Artist Heba Y. Amin engages with political themes and archival history, using mediums including film, photography, archival material, lecture performance and installation. Her artistic research takes a speculative, often satirical, approach to challenging narratives of conquest and control.

Amin is a Professor of Digital and Time-Based art at ABK-Stuttgart, the co-founder of the Black Athena Collective, curator of visual art for the Mizna journal, and currently sits on the editorial board of the Journal of Digital War. She was awarded the 2020 Sussmann Artist Award for artists committed to the ideals of democracy and antifascism, and was selected as a 2019 Field of Vision Fellow, NYC by Oscar winning director Laura Poitras. Her latest publication, "Heba Y. Amin: The General's Stork" (ed. Anthony Downey) was recently published by Sternberg Press (2020) and her works and interventions have been covered by The New York Times, The Guardian, the Intercept, and BBC among others. Her works are included in the collections of the British Museum, the Daimler Art Collection, KADIST Art Foundation, among others. Furthermore, Amin is also one of the artists behind the subversive graffiti action on the set of the television series "Homeland" which received worldwide media attention.

Amin lives in Berlin.



www.hebaamin.com

ATOM ELEGY

2022

12 miniature dummies, mixed media

160cm 210cm x 30cm

Atom Elogy confronts France's nuclear experiments in Algeria and the far-reaching impact of radioactive fallout. A haunting photograph from 1960 depicts two rows of human-like figures awaiting the detonation of an atomic bomb in the Algerian desert. Through a miniature model and live photo reconstruction of the photograph, "Atom Elogy" (2022) captures the anticipation of nuclear violence as an imminent event occurring in real-time. The catastrophic vision of nuclear destruction, a potent symbol of hubristic modernity, is both sublimated and foregrounded as a testimony to the colonial legacies of territorial destruction and, crucially, the neocolonial will to occupy future realities. The title "Atom Elogy" refers to the poem, published in 1946, of the same name by the German-French poet Yvan Goll. The poem was composed with the utopian promises of an "age of nuclear power" and attendant ideals of modernism in mind. However, after the detonation of the first atomic bomb, and the destructive violence it unleashed, Goll substantially revised "Atom Elogy". The original manuscript is in the collection of the civic foundation of the Center for Persecuted Arts in Solingen, Germany.

Top:
Staedtische Galerie Nordhorn, photo courtesy Helmut Claus

Bottom:
Dummies installed in the Sahara for French Nuclear Testing
Experiments near Reggane, Algeria, Dec. 1960
Archival Image





OPERATION SUNKEN SEA

2018- ongoing

performance, multi-media installation

vimeo: <https://vimeo.com/282630448>, Password: Atlantropa

In the Collection of Frac Nouvelle-Aquitaine

Invested in the power of technology to generate a new future for humankind, OPERATION SUNKEN SEA initiates a large-scale infrastructural intervention unparalleled in scale: a new era of human progress will be initiated through the draining and rerouting of the Mediterranean Sea to converge Africa and Europe into one supercontinent. The operation promises to bring an end to terrorism and the migration crisis, provide employment and energy alternatives and confront the rise of fascism. The project instills a fervent movement towards technocracy which takes a proactive stance towards the reparation of Africa and the Middle East by relocating the Mediterranean Sea within the African continent.

Referencing and expanding upon early twentieth century techno-utopian visions, OPERATION SUNKEN SEA is an ongoing research project and intervention by Heba Y. Amin that investigates significant transformations in territorial constructs and their impact on new geopolitical alliances and global politics. By shifting the paradigm in a time of neo-fascist necropolitics, the project responds to the contemporary moment of political uncertainty in Europe, the unrest and collapse of nation-states in the Middle East and the neo-liberal failure of globalization in Africa. The operation – mimicking languages (political, architectural and cultural) of fascist regimes – instigates a new vision for Africa and the Middle East by pinpointing what could be attained by and for those most affected by the wars waged for oil, resources and power in the last century.

Top:
Operation Sunken Sea: Visual Research, Flower Bouquets, 2020.

Bottom:
Operation Sunken Sea: Relocating the Mediterranean, Inaugural Speech, 2018
One channel video, 18'21"
Photo Documentation courtesy of Francesca Vella





Left:
Operation Sunken Sea, 2020
Installation view, Mosaic Rooms (flag)
Photo courtesy of Andy Stagg



Middle top:
Operation Sunken Sea (the Anti-Control Room) - Video wall, 2018
9 channel video 37'05"
Installation View



Middle bottom:
Operation Sunken Sea (the anti-Control room), 2018
Installation View, 10th Berlin Biennale
Photo courtesy of CHROMA

Right:
Operation Sunken Sea, 2020
Installation view, Mosaic Rooms
Photos courtesy of Andy Stagg





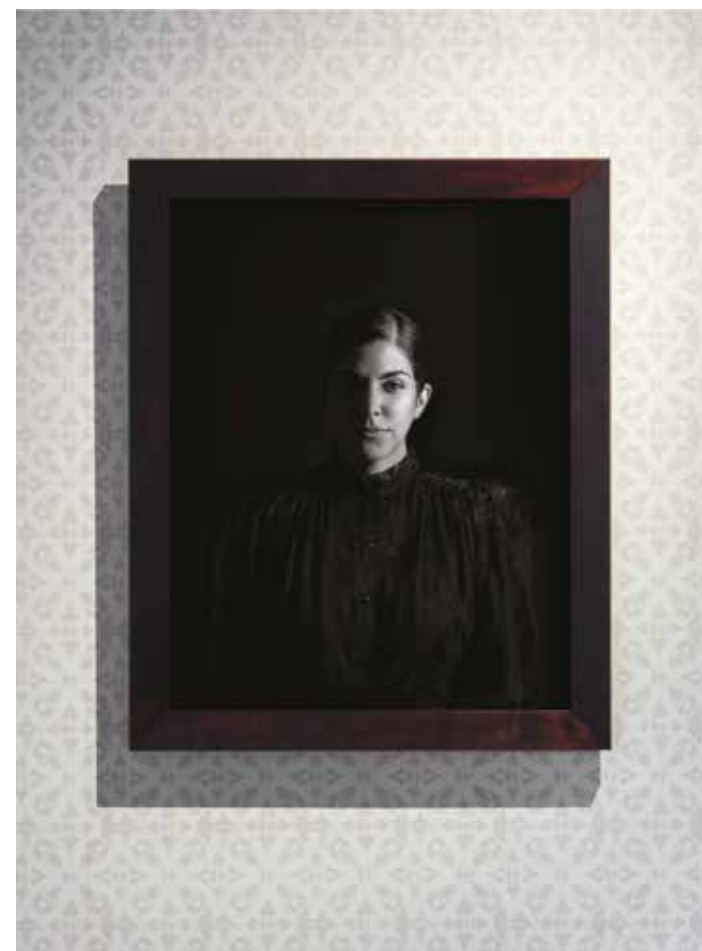
Top Left:
Portrait of Herman Soergel
Archive Photo

Bottom Left:
Visions of the Sea I, 2018
Crema laguna stone
15 x 38.6 x 43.5 cm

Top Right:
The Master's Tools I (restaging of Herman Soergel's portrait),
2018
B/W Archival Print
80 x 110 cm

Bottom Left:
Portrait of Woman as Dictator I, 2018
Archival B/W print
80 x 63 cm
Photo courtesy of Timo Ohler

Bottom Right:
Operation Sunken Sea
Installation View, Malta. 2018.
Valletta 2018, European Capital of Culture



THE DEVIL'S GARDEN: MARSEILLE'S PYRAMID

2019

Mixed Media: Pyramid replica (370 x 370 x 240 cm),
HD Video with subtitles (6'18" min)

Vimeo: <https://vimeo.com/379048737>

Password: Marseille

"The Devil's Garden" (2019 -ongoing) explores how colonial violence is engendered through both the material and immaterial occupation of future realities. Examining narratives relating to the German Afrika Korps and their lingering presence in northern Egypt, this project observes how — during the WWII campaign in al-Alamein — millions of landmines were planted by Erwin Rommel's army. Through her research and fieldwork in what remains one of the most landmine-infested regions in the world, Amin came across a peculiar pyramid built by the Luftwaffe to commemorate the WWII German fighter pilot Hans Joachim Marseille. By creating a replica of the Nazi-era memorial and bringing it back to Germany, the artist inverts the historical framing of these events and focuses on how European propaganda — perpetuated by mainstream films, in particular — continues to disavow responsibility for the techno-fossils that remain in the aftermath of colonial violence.

**Mathew Letuku and "Der Stern von Afrika":
Interview with Roberto Blanco, 2019**

Shot in front of Amin's replica of a WWII German fighter pilot's memorial in Northern Egypt, this interview with Cuban-German celebrity Roberto Blanco addresses his role in "Der Stern von Afrika", a controversial biopic about Hans Joachim Marseille for whom the monument is built. While mostly recognized for his success in schlager music in Germany, Blanco's film career began as the apparently fun-loving butler to Marseille in this 1957 film. In reality, his character "Mathias" was an actual person, Corporal Mathew Letuku, who was a prisoner of war from South Africa fighting for the British army. Not surprisingly, Letuku's reports differ greatly from those in the German media at the time and how he came to be represented in the film was, likewise, at odds with his personal recollections. In a further act of epistemological violence, Letuku's experience of the years spent in captivity until 1945, alongside that of 14,583 other South African soldiers taken as prisoners of war in Germany and Italy in 1942, were effectively written out of the film's narrative.





AS BIRDS FLYING

2016

video, 07:11 min

vimeo: <https://vimeo.com/239365580>, password: Allenby

In the collection of KADIST

In a world of political unrest and total surveillance, suspicion and paranoia can become normalized. In 2013, news stories told of a fisherman in Egypt who spotted a migratory stork fitted with an electronic device on its right leg. Fearing foreign tampering, the fisherman reported the bird. The animal was apprehended by the Egyptian authorities on suspicion of espionage. The would-be 'spying device' on the stork was later shown to be a scientific tracking device used by Hungarian scientists to follow the stork's migratory patterns (a follow-up report noted that the stork was released into the wild, captured and eaten).

Heba Y. Amin's film *As Birds Flying* (2016) responds to the absurdity of such accusations, which occur in moments of political strain. The short, allegorical film is constructed out of found drone footage of aerial views of savannas and wetlands, including settlements in Galilea – sweeping views that seem to be taken by the 'spy' stork in the above story. 'Seeing the country from the top is better than seeing it from

below', the soundtrack says, with footage of a bird soaring in the air. Funny, absurd and disconcerting, the video's suspenseful cinematic soundtrack contains the reconstructed audio sequences of dialogue from Adel Imam's film *Birds of Darkness*. In that 1995 film – which tells the story of religious and secular political candidates in Egypt – a toxic mixture of political corruption and religious radicalism is shown to have deleterious effects on society. In the reconstructed dialogue, the characters discuss political sectarianism, censorship, democracy and surveillance. 'The law, as it serves the truth, serves the deceit,' says one character.

In its footage of birds flocking or perched alone, the film resonates with contemporary political tensions between individualism and crowds, and questions whether birds of a feather really do flock together. The work also considers what it would look like to take literally the dubious narratives constructed by repressive governments, and the flocks of paranoia and conspiratorial thinking that thus arise.

Text by Pablo Larious







Lord Allenby and his pet Stork, Cairo 1922

THE GENERAL'S STORK

2016 - ongoing

mixed-media Installation, performance lecture

<http://www.hebaamin.com/works/the-generals-stork/>

Military technologies throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries were developed against the backdrop of Middle Eastern geographies. As war became dictated by the needs of technology, conquest from the sky transformed Western warfare into an imbalanced spectacle of high-tech weaponry. Techno-aesthetics became inherently tied to the image of the Middle East as the language of occupation and colonization was written in to the visualization of landscape through land surveying, aerial mapping, bombing and drone warfare.

In late 2013, Egypt made worldwide headlines when authorities detained a migratory stork traveling to Egypt through Israel because of an electronic device attached to its body. It was suspected of espionage. Almost one hundred years earlier, Lord Allenby, the British High Commissioner in Cairo, completed a major phase in biblical prophecy by launching 'bird-like machines' to capture Jerusalem from the Ottomans. *The General's Stork* is an evolving lecture performance that looks at how territory is visualized in direct correlation to the development of twentieth century technological warfare in the Middle East. It takes the perspective of the "disembodied eye" and utilizes a landscape way of seeing to address the political consequences of religious prophecies, colonial narratives, and the politics of surveillance on the contemporary state of paranoia which turned a migrating bird into an international spy.

Research/Practice 02
**Heba Y.
Amin**
The General's Stork

Edited by
Anthony Downey



SternbergPress ✨





The General's Stork, 2020
 Installation view, Mosaic Rooms
 Photos courtesy of Andy Stagg

WINDOWS ON THE WEST

2019

Hand-woven Jacquard Textile, 250 x 135 cm

In the collection of Musee du Quai Branly - Jacques Chirac

The first documented photograph taken on the African continent dates from November 7, 1839, merely three months after France introduced the daguerreotype camera to the world. The photo was taken in Alexandria by French painter Horace Vernet, along with his nephew Frédéric Goupil-Fesque, who captured the exterior of Muhammad Ali Pasha's harem palace. Even though there was nothing erotic about the image, it created a sensation in Paris by igniting fantasies about what the French envisioned as a suggestive subject matter.

Due to the inaccessibility of the North African female subject, European artists invented an idea of romance by photographing the native woman to fit their vision, their fabricated delusion. While these hierarchical relations are in place, the bodies themselves are invisible. The harem is not actually pictured, but the idea of the women is implied through the voyeuristic gaze of the technological device. Even Vernet alludes to the predatory manner of his photographic excursions, particularly in Egypt: they were "daguerreotyping like lions", he writes.

The original photographic plate of Vernet's and Goupil-Fesque's expedition no longer exists. The only copy that remains is the lithograph (above), translated from the original photograph. Windows on the West copies the "original" by transforming it to a textile, and situates it back in the local technologies of weaving that have been grounded in Egypt for centuries. In doing so, it attempts to eliminate the embedded narrative of the Western male gaze.

The work was exhibited for the first time in Egypt's 14th century Hall of Moheb al-Den Abu al-Tayeb, in the heart of historic Cairo (UNESCO heritage site) and located directly adjacent to the Egyptian Textile Museum, the only textile museum in the Middle East narrating the history of textiles with Egypt at its center.





PROJECT SPEAK2TWEET

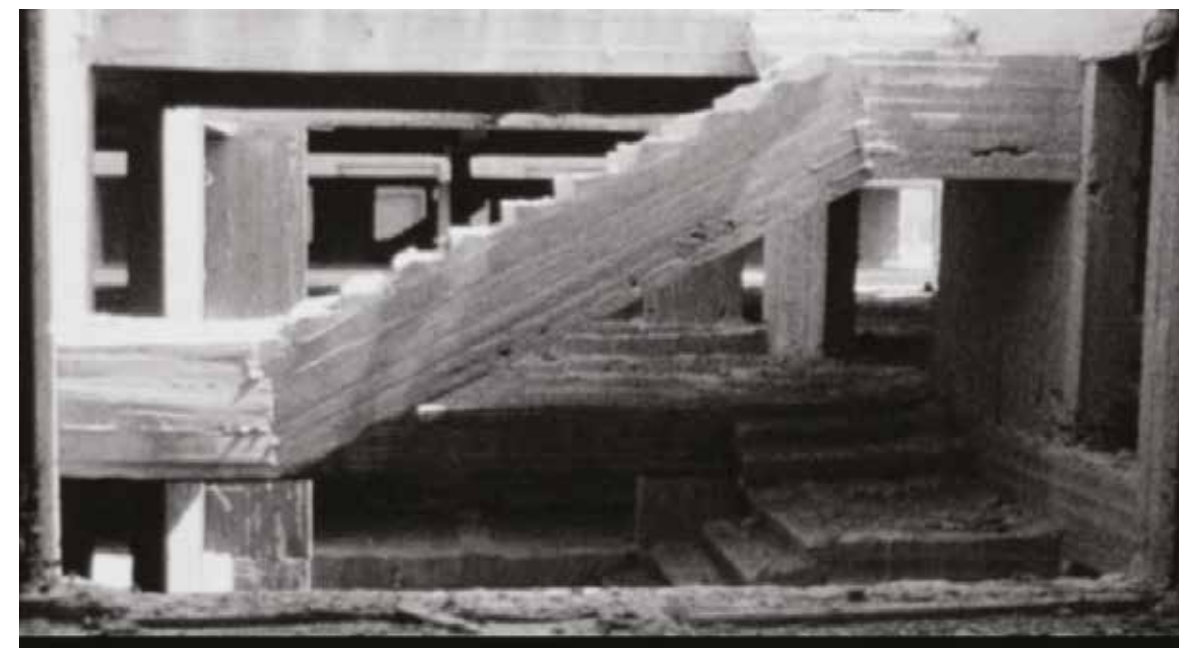
2011- ongoing

B/W multi-channel video, audio

<http://www.hebaamin.com/works/project-speak2tweet/>

On January 27th, 2011 Egyptian authorities succeeded in shutting down the country's international Internet access points in response to growing protests. Over one weekend, a group of programmers developed a platform called Speak2Tweet that would allow Egyptians to post their breaking news on Twitter via voicemail despite Internet cuts. The result was thousands of heartfelt messages from Egyptians recording their emotions by phone. A few years later the messages are no longer accessible to the public.

Speak2Tweet composed a unique archive of the collective psyche; as the voices disappeared in the depths of cyberspace, this project brings forth the unique narratives and, in turn, connects them once again to the physical realm. Project Speak2Tweet is both a research project and a growing archive of experimental films that utilizes Speak2Tweet messages prior to the fall of the Mubarak regime on February 11, 2011 and juxtaposes them with the abandoned structures that represent the long-lasting effects of a corrupt dictatorship. The project interrogates the re-imagining of the urban myth, of visualizing the city from the "personal" perspective through the highly problematic constructs of (un)democratic tools. It explores the emergence of the imagined city from internal monologues and investigates historical narratives via glitches in digital memory. Through the multi-layered spatial relationships, the project attempts to portray the psychology of the urban realm. As the visual archive grows, Project Speak2Tweet changes and transforms into an altered space that mimics the hallucination of the inner voice.





Project Speak2Tweet, 2011-Ongoing
B/W multi-channel video, audio
various installation views

FRUIT FROM SATURN

2019
mixed-media installation, photographs
various sizes

Fruit from Saturn borrows its title from German-French poet Yvan Goll's 1946 book of poems by the same name. Its opening poem, "Atom Elegy" was inspired by the invention of the atomic bomb when the promise of the "atomic age" brought with it utopian ideas of progress and modernity. The poem later changed when the detonation of the first nuclear weapon revealed its destructive power.

Techno-utopian ideas, as manifest in characteristic machines of colonial soft power, are at the heart of Heba Y. Amin's practice. Working across media, the artist uses Goll's writing to reflect on the concepts of domination and authoritarianism exercised through technology. Fruit from Saturn highlights the failures of the nation-state paradigm and the technological violence nurtured by nationalisms. Through trajectories marked by colonial warfare and failed political movements in North Africa, the artist examines the use of technologies for hegemonic power and the technofossils they leave behind.

The photographs portray a scenario of a land surveyor from Africa, the artist herself, assessing and mapping German landscapes through optical devices by night. The works tell the story of modern technological progress as one of empire and colonial exploitation.



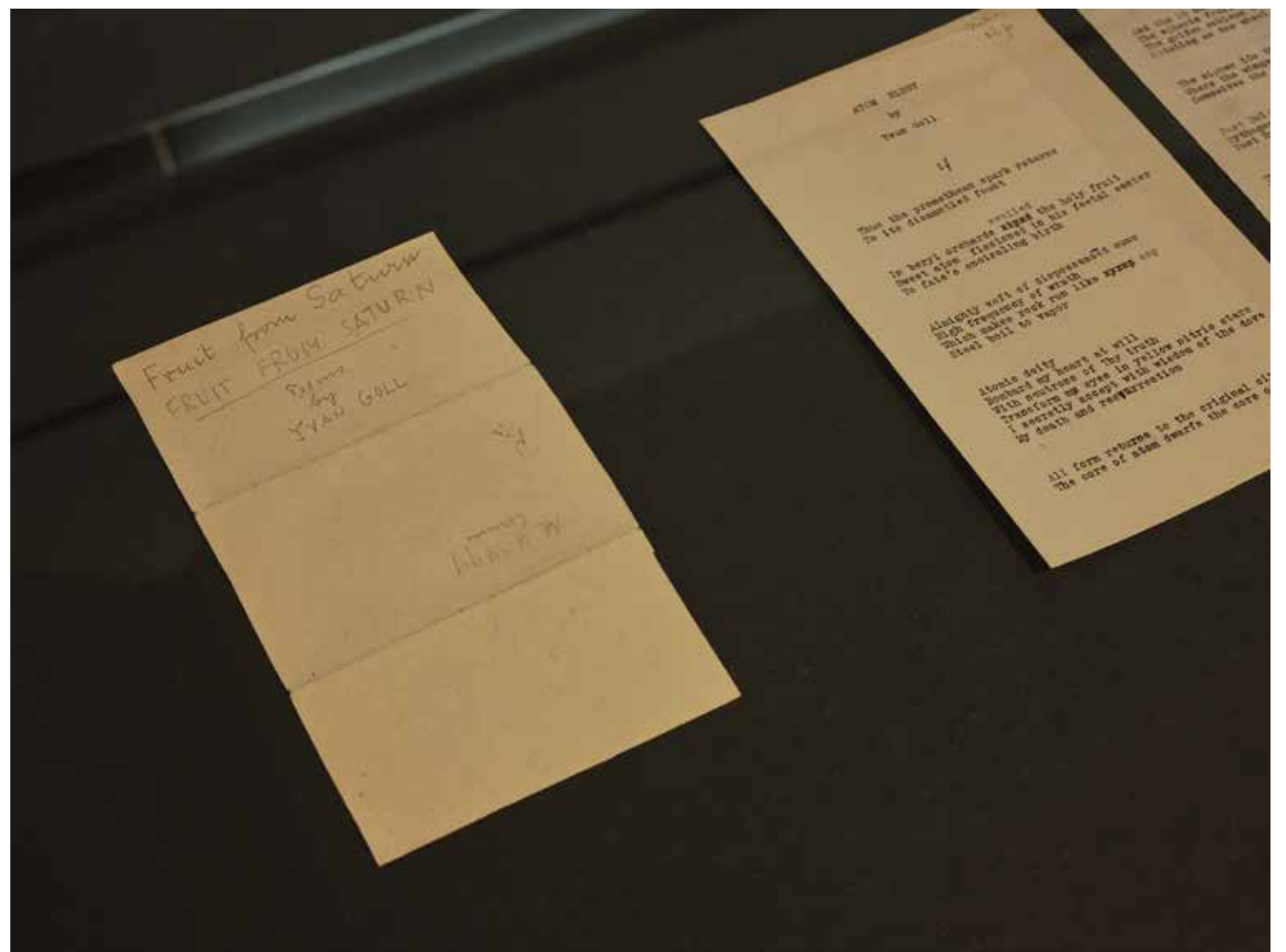
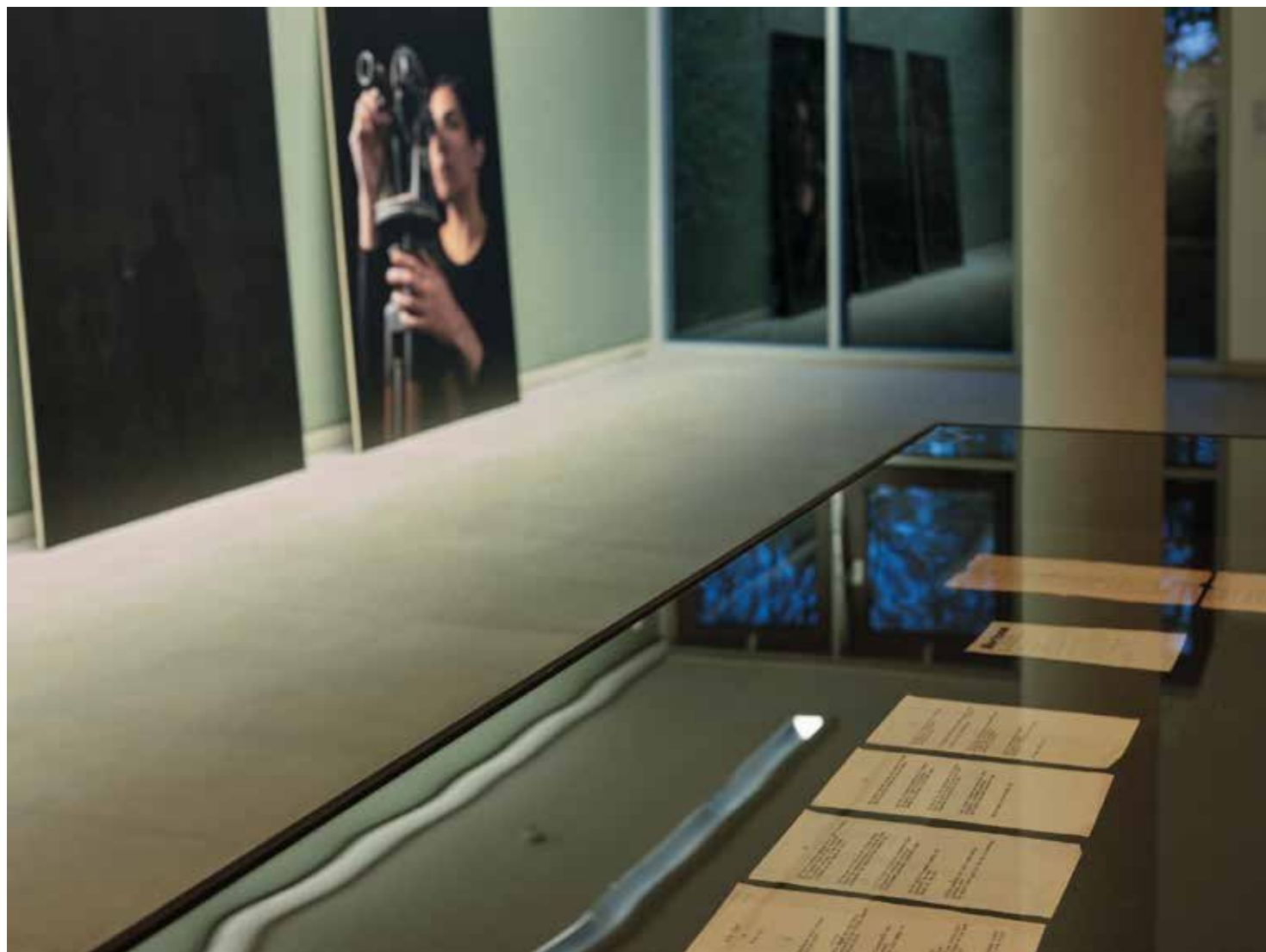
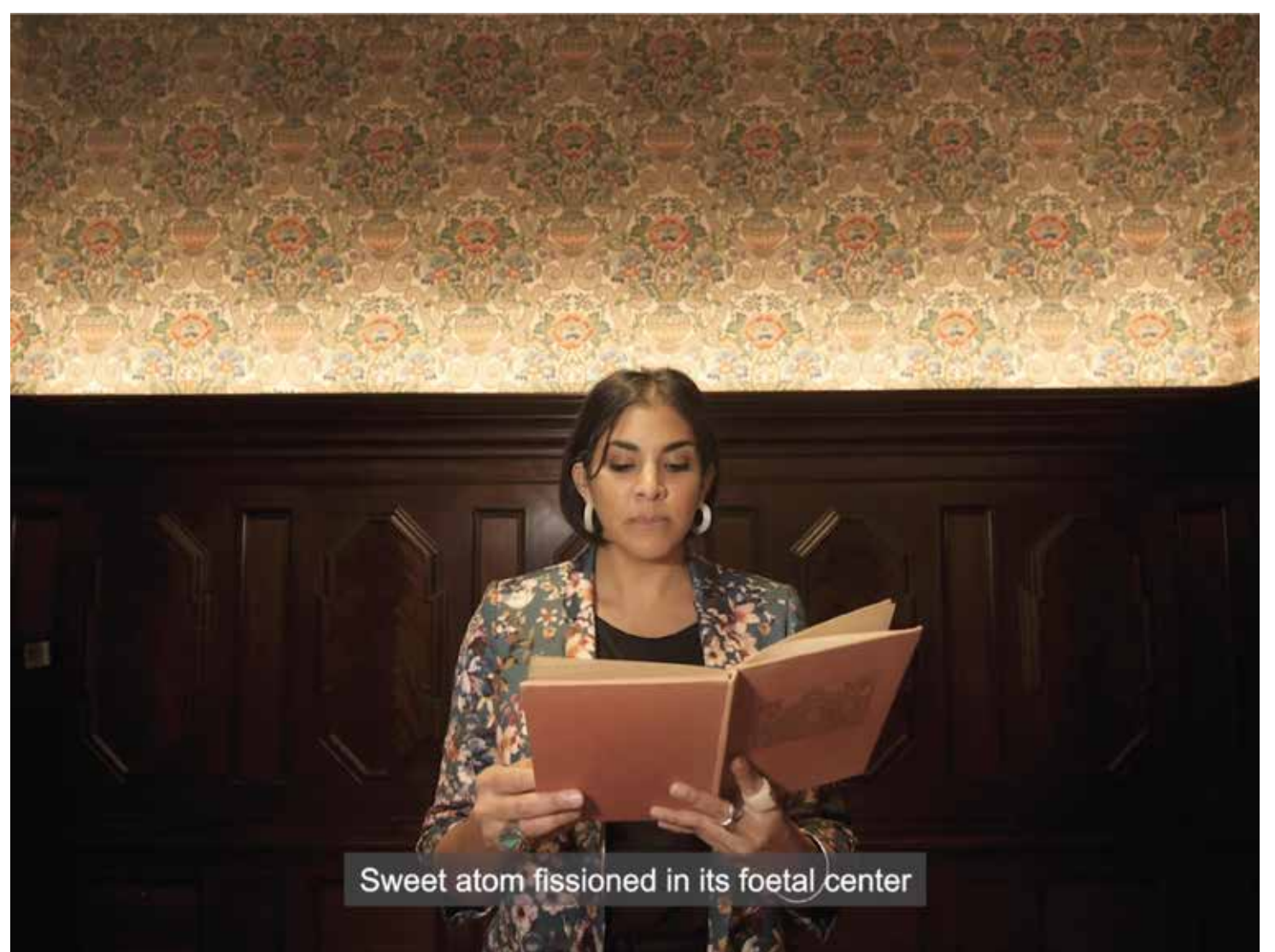


Right to Left:

Portrait with Theodolite I, 2019
Pigment Print on Archival Paper
200 x 150 cm

Survey of German Landscapes by Night (New Morgenthau Plan) I, 2019
Pigment Print
200 x 150 cm

Portrait with Theodolite II, 2019
Pigment Print on Archival Paper
200 x 150 cm



THE EARTH IS AN IMPERFECT ELLIPSOID

2016

mixed-media installation

<http://www.hebaamin.com/works/the-earth-is-an-imperfect-ellipsoid/>

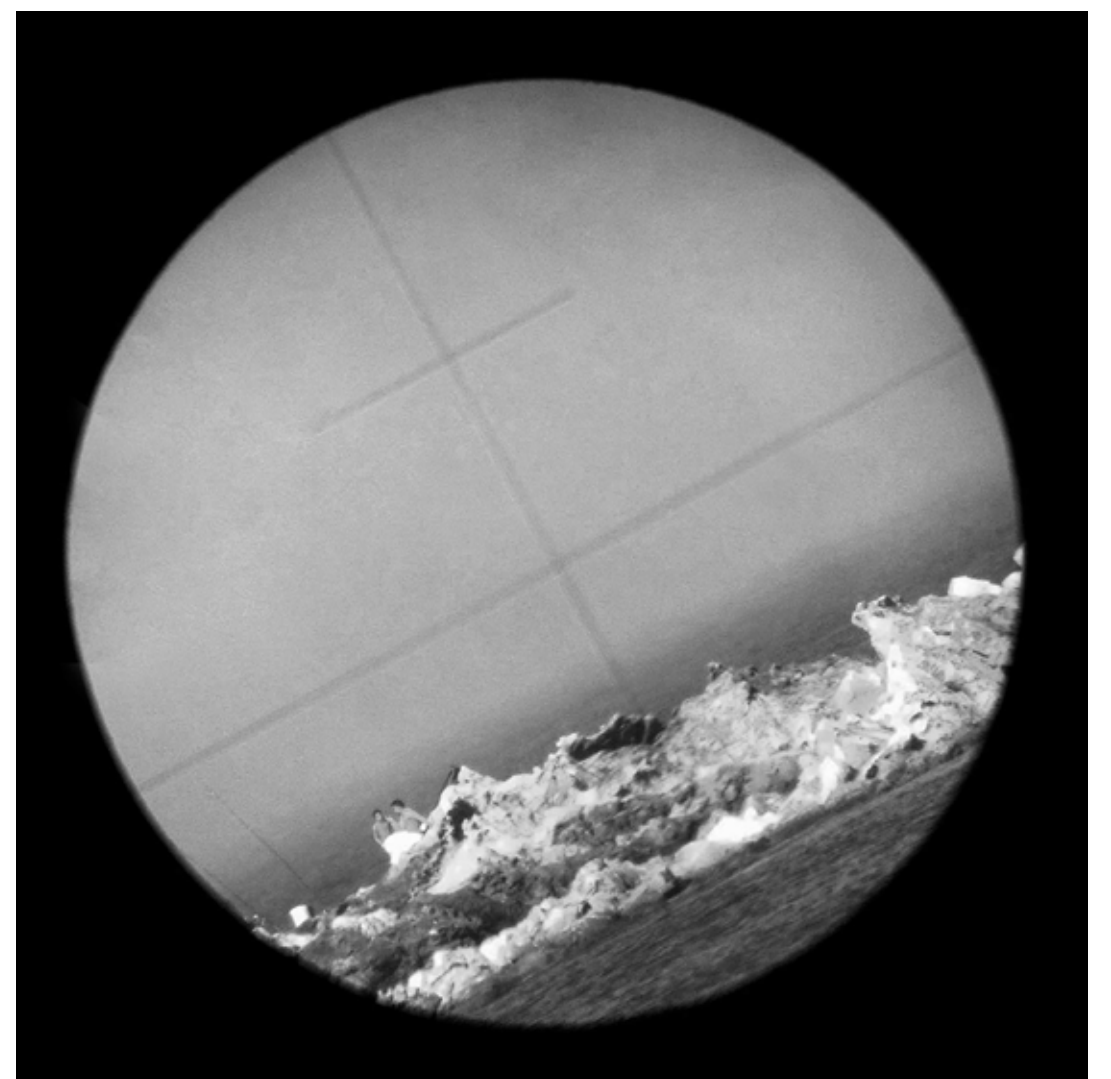
"The Earth is an Imperfect Ellipsoid" utilizes Al-Bakri's "Kitab al-Masalik wal-Mamalik" (The Book of Roads and Kingdoms), an eleventh-century Arabic geography text describing major trade routes in West Africa under the Islamic Empire. Today, the original manuscript only exists in fragments. In 2014, Heba Y. Amin embarked on a five-month journey along the same routes, starting the project in Nigeria and traveling to Europe by road. With a theodolite, she documented the contemporary geographies missing from the manuscript. "The gauzy chiaroscuro of the images evokes the visual aesthetics of the historical colonial past, but the subject matter which she captures, lonely wind turbines stationed in the desert, a nest of satellite dishes perched on squat urban rooftops, are unmistakably contemporary. The world documented in Bakri is recognizable to modern viewers by virtue of many of the same economic and cultural forces that drove the chroniclers on whose accounts of the region Bakri's book is based." (William Kherbek)

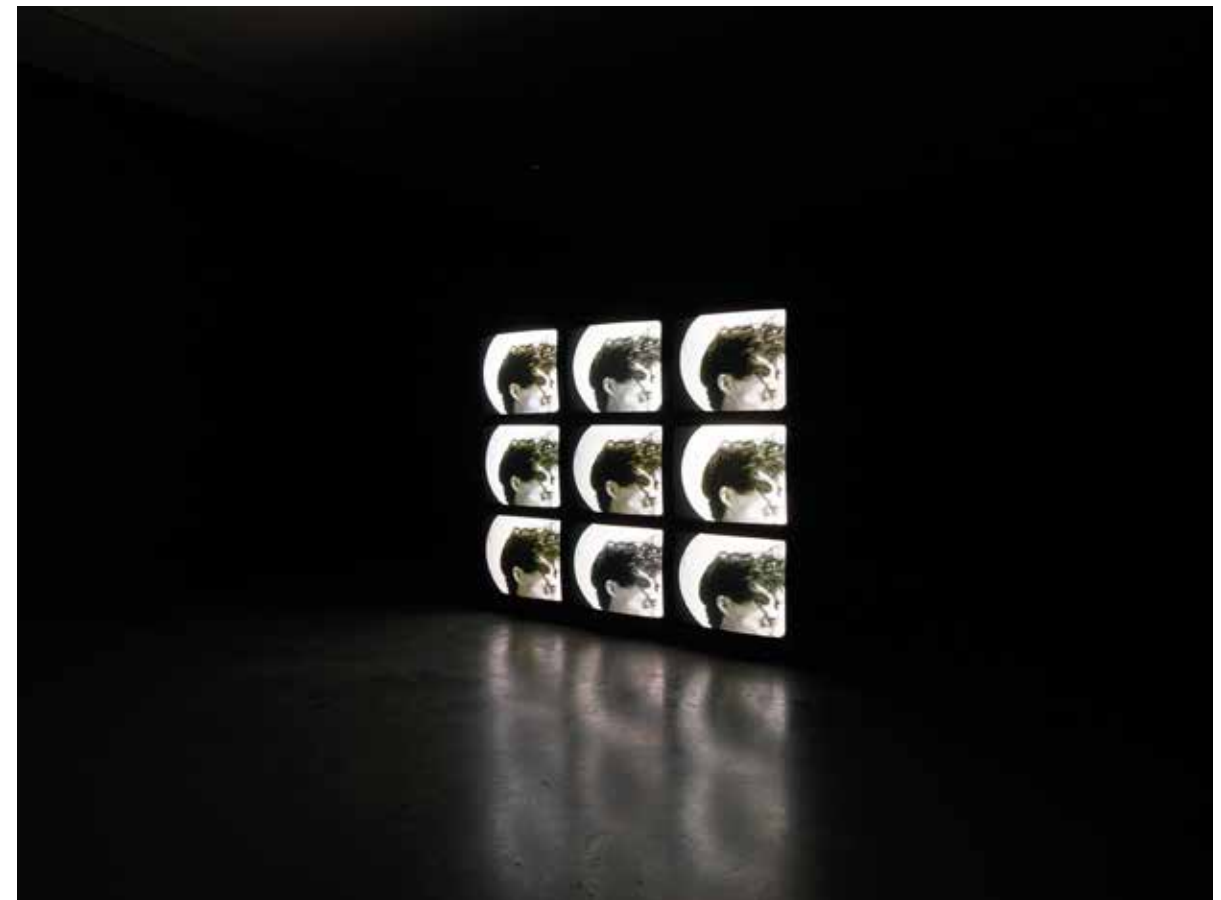
By contrast to Al-Bakri, who never visited West Africa himself, the artist set out to follow the trade routes described, and has added the missing passages in her artistic project. The historic routes, which pass through current crisis regions in some parts, often correspond to today's paths of migration. As an Egyptian woman travelling through numerous border crossings – Amin required 12 visas – she was frequently confronted by experiences of bureaucratic-sexist power games. Using "Kitab al-Masalik wal-Mamalik" as a travel guide, the project confronts the authored accounts of merchants, traders and travelers who describe geographies through sexually explicit descriptions of the women they encounter. She secretly recorded her interactions with border-patrol officers and surveilled the landscapes she encountered to document the sexual dynamics of bureaucracy connected to territory.

The project looks at the historical paradigms of technology and urban development connected to contemporary migratory paths. By employing cartographic research and landscape surveillance, the work critiques the predatory view of landscape and the exoticization of women's bodies in relation to geography.

52° 35.45' N, 17° 3' 32.08" W
Nouadhibou, Mauritania
B/W pigment print on Metallic Silver 300 Archival Paper
20,5 x 20,5 x 14 cm

54° 41.6' N, 5° 23' 3.95" W
Ceuta, Spain
B/W pigment print on Metallic Silver 300 Archival Paper
20,5 x 20,5 x 14 cm





The Earth is an Imperfect Ellipsoid, 2016
21 photographs
B/W pigment print on Metallic Silver 300 Archival Paper
20,5 x 20,5 x 14 cm each

Right:
The Pupil of The Mosquito's Eye, 2016
Multi-Channel Video Installation
4'20'



AN ASTRONOMICAL DETERMINATION OF THE DISTANCE BETWEEN TWO CITIES

2014-2017

photographs, video, mixed-media installation

<http://www.hebaamin.com/works/an-astronomical-determination-of-the-distance-between-two-cities/>

An Astronomical Determination of the Distance Between Two Cities is a multi-part project that examines the structural remnants of La Agüera, a former Spanish colonial outpost buried in the sand dunes of the Ras Nouadhibou peninsula in West Africa. The project explores the town's colonial era in juxtaposition to the remaining architecture guarded by Mauritanian military forces. Through the found memoir of Jesús Flores Thies, the last living inhabitant of this Spanish colony from 1933, the video *The Last Witness* confronts the clash between one man's nostalgia for his childhood in Spanish Sahara with the lengthy and brutal struggle for a land whose sovereignty is still disputed after Spanish withdrawal in 1975.





Previous Page:

The Act of Remembering, Spanish Sahara I
2014, B/W Archival Print, 75cm x 50cm

The Act of Remembering, Spanish Sahara II
2014, B/W Archival Print, 75cm x 50cm

The Last Colony, 2014
Pigment Print on Archival Paper
75 cm x 50 cm

Current Page:

The Last Witness, 2017
HD Video
Stills

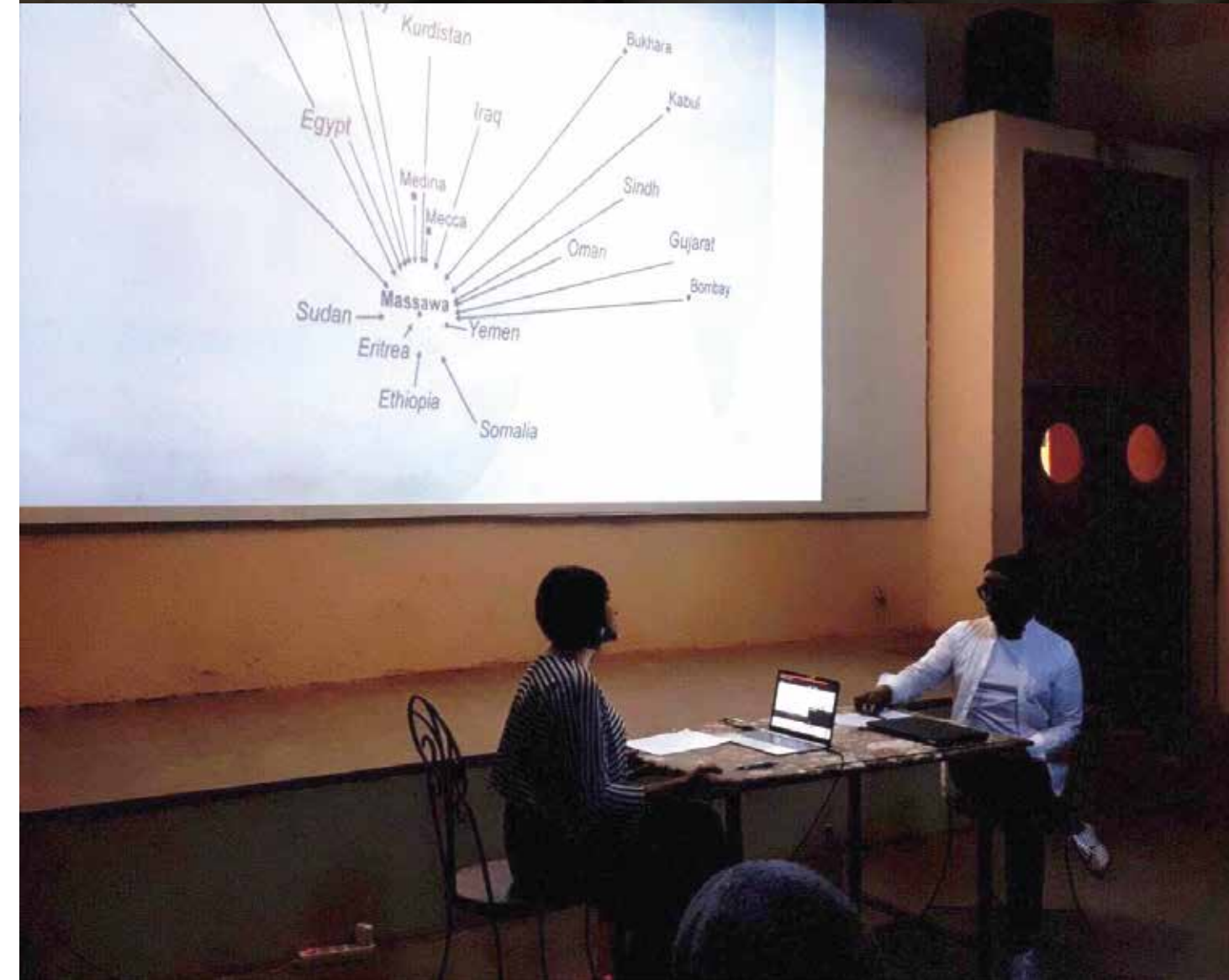
BLACK ATHENA COLLECTIVE

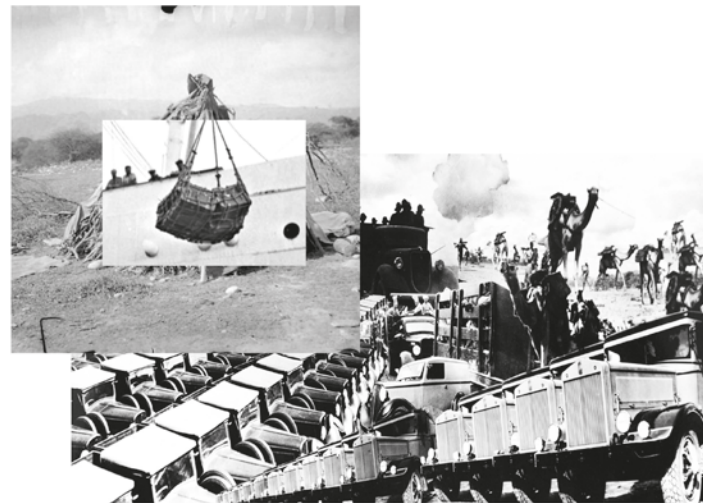
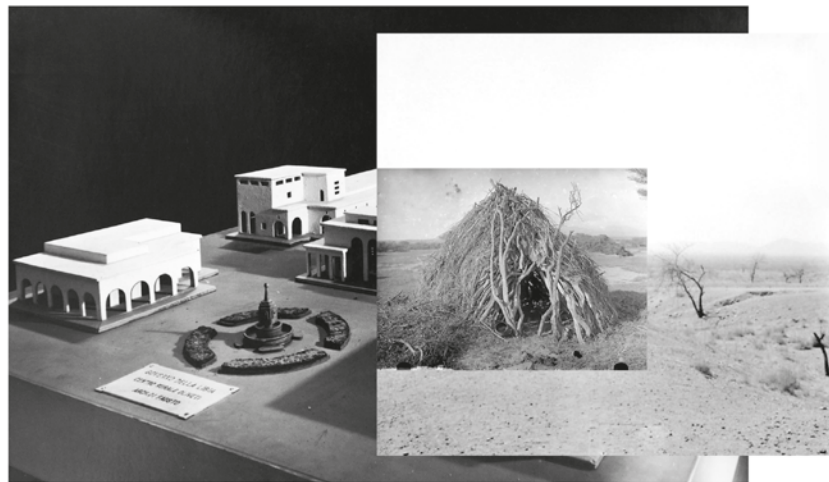
Artist Collective, 2015

In late 2015, we founded the Black Athena Collective, a research and artistic laboratory for experimentation that engages political discourse and practices of spatial construction connected to the Red Sea region from Eritrea to Egypt. The collective was born out of a need to address mobility as a crucial principle for structuring new approaches to territorial convention, citizenship and politicization. Through multi-disciplinary perspectives including geography, sociology and history, the Black Athena Collective addresses the dominant territorial logics and constitution of place versus the transience of individuals; it looks specifically at architecture(s) in relation to errant bodies. Architecture, in this case, is considered in terms of wider ethical and political principles.

The collective draws from challenges posed by Martin Bernal's thesis which questions methodological assumptions embedded within Western historiography. We are specifically interested in confronting the Euro-centric bias of landscape discourse: "Is it possible that landscape, understood as the historical 'invention' of a new visual/pictorial medium, is integrally connected with imperialism?". Our approach opposes the predatory view of landscape discourse, especially within the context of colonialism on the African continent. Rather, a new discourse on visual responses to landscape of the region is necessary, one that does not engage the continent as a fixed category but rather as an uneven and entangled terrain where conceptual operations are assembled and contested. We speak of a migration of images and their constructions as transitory forms moving across 'bounded' spaces. Can our methodology allow us to achieve more complex and definitive ways of thinking and interacting with land?

The Black Athena Collective was founded in 2015 by artists Heba Y. Amin (EGY) and Dawit L. Petros (ER/CA).





Nowhere is a Place, 2016
 Artist Book
 B/W Print on Archival Paper
 Book details

Bottom right:
 The tent as an image of the cosmos, 2020
 Installation, Istanbul Design Biennial

SCULPTURES - ON OPTICS AND VISION

2016 - ongoing
iron, various sizes

In the collection of Daimler Contemporary

This ongoing series of sculptures is inspired by early diagrams of vision and optics from the seminal text "Kitab al-Manazir" (Book of Optics) by Ibn Haytham from the 11th century. His exploration of light and its transmission established the intromission theory as the accepted scientific model that vision takes place by light entering the eye.

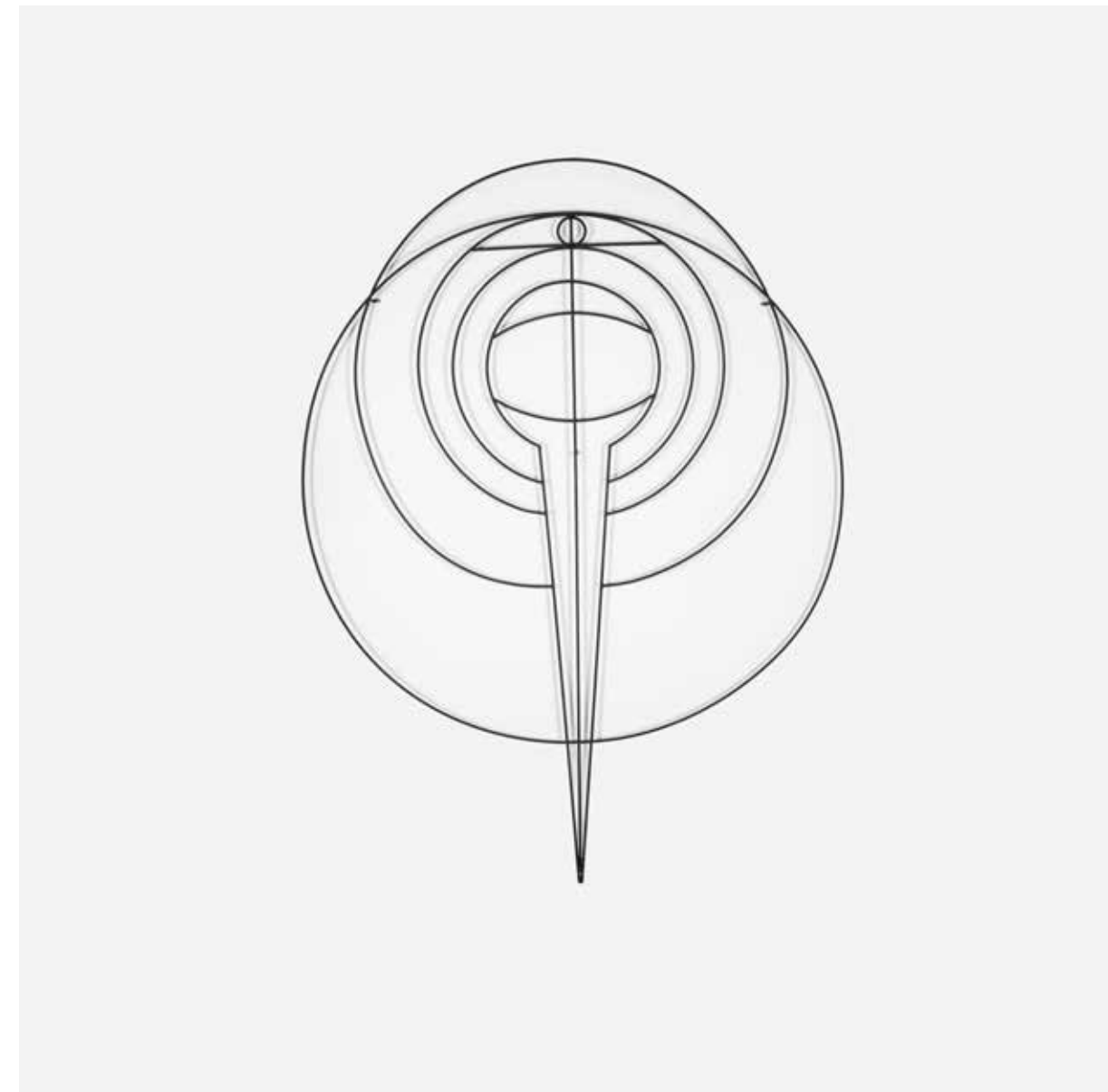
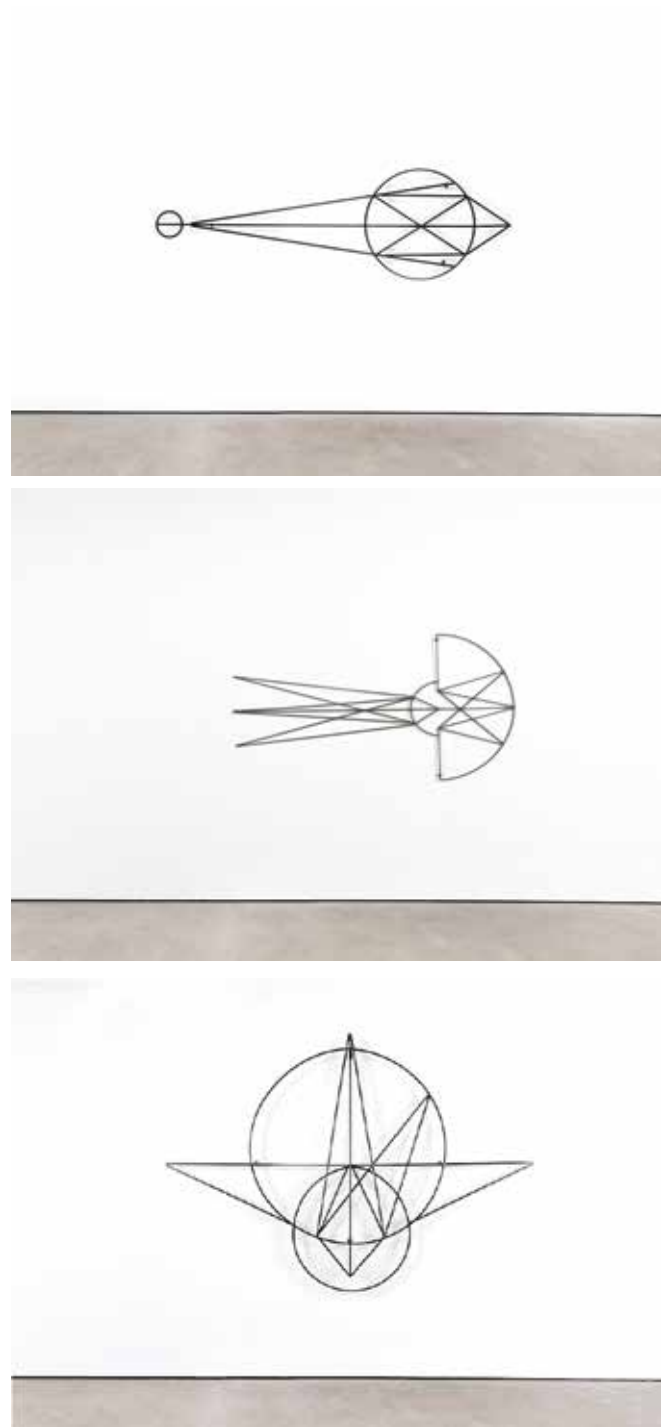
Placed within various contexts and with other works, these sculptures speak to a questioning of vision and perception. They critique the problem of contemporary thinking and politics through narrow ways of seeing. Ibn Haytham's legacy was predominantly erased from dominant historical narratives by the colonial project, a violent act of cultural erasure. The sculptures ask the viewer to scrutinize how we see history; whose history?

Left:
A Refraction of Histories, 2018
Iron, powder coated
200 x 65 x 6 cm

A Formulation for Unknowing, 2019
hand painted iron
200cm x 125cm x 4cm

A Rectilinear Propagation of Thought, 2018
Iron, powder coated
197 x 142 x 8 cm

Right:
Asfara, 2016
Hand painted Iron
250 x 186 x 6 cm



HOMELAND IS NOT A SERIES

2015

graffiti hack, video

<http://www.hebaamin.com/works/the-arabian-street-artists/>

In July 2015 "The Arabian Street Artists" engineered a graffiti media hack by incorporating subversive graffiti on the set of the popular US TV series 'Homeland'. Three months later episode 2 of season 5 was broadcast with the show unknowingly critiquing itself. After the story broke it went viral and was reported by media all over the world.

Heba Amin, Caram Kapp and Don Karl collectively adopted the ironic name "The Arabian Street Artists" from email communication between them and the 'Homeland' crew. Their filmic commentary 'Homeland is Not a Series', produced by Laura Poitras (Citizenfour) at Field of Vision, explores dialogues following the worldwide resonance of the critique that motivated the hack.



Graffiti action on the set of the TV- Series "Homeland". 2015.

Top: "Homeland is Watermelon" (left), "There is no Homeland" (right); Bottom: "#blacklivesmatter" (left), "Homeland is Racist" (right)



Homeland Graffiti hack. Season 5, Episode 2. 2015. Still from series.
Graffiti: There is no Homeland

Homeland graffiti hack. Season 5, Episode 2. 2015. Still from series.
Graffiti: 1001 Calamities