Bellagio Center Creative Arts Fellowship
ALA YOUNIS
ALA YOUNIS initiates journeys, mostly in archives and collections, of narratives that relate to collective experiences collapsing into personal ones. She is a research-based artist, curator, and writer, with works including exhibition, film, and book projects. Through her practice, Younis builds collections of found material, or crafts this material when it cannot be found or does not exist. Working within a situated knowledge of geographies, ideologies, nationalism, and social inheritances in the Arab World, her protagonists are the terrain, the intellectual, the ruler, and the products.

The social and political histories embedded within certain objects, for example a discontinued sewing machine, Nefertiti (2008), featured prominently in her early work. Produced and sold in Egypt shortly after 1952 as part of the government’s effort to nationalize industry, the machine offered women the chance to generate income while men were at war. The retirement of Nefertiti in the ‘80s and the complex testimonies different Egyptians offered for this object and its time is explored in an experimental short film produced by Younis that renders Nefertiti a disheartening disappointment for the older generation, and a nostalgic icon from the heyday of nationalistic sentiments.

A subsequent trilogy of work [Nefertiti, Needles to Rockets (2009), Six days (2009), and UAR (2014)] presented a repertoire of images and objects that delve into Egyptian modernism and the appropriation of symbols from a glorious past. The rhetoric of science, appropriation and industrialisation are present in UAR, which features products of the short-lived United Arab Republic (1958 – 1971). Here, the focus is the mechanisms and promises that shaped the historical legacy of President Nasser, which continues to stir complicated debate fashioning him as both hero and anti-hero.

The rigor of these heavily researched projects is reflected in meticulous installations that utilize size, technology, archives, popular culture, humour, literature, and collaborations. In the work Tin Soldiers (2010-2012) she customized and moved 12,213 hand-painted metal soldiers, depicting 1:200 of the active troops of nine armies in the Middle East, to multiple international exhibition venues including Beirut's Home Works, the Istanbul Biennial, and later to venues in Amman, Sao Paulo, Berlin, and oslo. Tin Soldiers was then reproduced as a publication with a different focus, following military practices in real and virtual spaces to highlight the transformations within reflexive, fantastical, simulated, or broken fighters. The two-year research project culminated in a 280-page publication with text and image contributions of more than twenty artists, writers, soldiers, and filmmakers. The Tin Soldiers' publication project appeared as a collective exhibition in the New Museum Triennial (2012) and Gwangju Biennial (2012).

Her exhibition project An Index of Tensional and Unintentional Love of Land (2014), set within Here and Elsewhere at the New Museum, was an attempt to describe the recent history of the Arab world by tracing the movement of 'Palestine' across time and geography, through juxtaposed images, artworks, photographs, and documents of visual culture with a focus on the 1960s – 1980s. It offered a critical look at the constant transfer of subjects from one place to another, at icons that emerge and recede in the popular imagination, and at artists’ practices, revealing various modes of individuals relating to pan-Arab nationalism and the promise of political revolution.

Plan for Greater Baghdad (2015) premiered in ‘All the World’s Futures’, the 56th Venice Biennale exhibition, before it reappeared as a poem in e-flux SUPERCOMMUNITY special issue for the Venice Biennale. Activated by a set of 35mm slides taken by architect Rifat Chadirji in 1982 of a gymnasium in Baghdad that was designed by Le Corbusier and named after Saddam Hussein, the project investigates the metamorphosis of the gymnasium structure through numerous iterations of plans over twenty-five years before it was completed in 1980. The first phase of the work was presented as a set of three-dimensional models made of materials from the demonnents of historical time, pertaining to the men who appear in the Plan for Greater Baghdad, as well the interventions into existing documents culled from various archives. This dual-layered timeline pits developments in the gymnasium story against those in Baghdad. Part of the research related to Plan for Greater Baghdad (2015) was developed during the artist’s time in Bellagio in 2013.
PLAN FOR GREATER BAGHDAD

Two- and three-dimensional prints, drawings, archival material and model. Installation view: 56th International Art Exhibition – la Biennale di Venezia, All the World’s Futures.

Courtesy la Biennale di Venezia. Photo by Alessandra Chemollo.
Left and bottom photos by We Exhibit, Venice. Courtesy of the Artist.
AN INDEX OF TENSIONAL AND UNINTENTIONAL LOVE OF LAND

2014

Exhibition presented as part of "Here and Elsewhere" (2013), New Museum, New York. The project features works by Adel Abidin, Mustapha Akrim, Yto Barrada, Mohssin Harraki, Mona Hatoum, Amina Menia, Abdul Hay Moosidam, as well as archival materials and images from Magnum Photos, Arab Image Foundation, Palestine Photo Project Archives, Dar Al Fata Al Arabi publications, Hani Jawhariah’s camerawork, Mohieddine Ellabbad’s concepts, Tewfik Saleh’s films and others.

Courtesy New Museum, New York. Photo: Benoit Pailley
AN INDEX OF TENSIONAL AND UNINTENTIONAL LOVE OF LAND

2014

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Courtesy New Museum, New York. Photo: Benoit Pailley
FROM THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF ONE PAGE BEING LIKE THE OTHER

2014

Oraib Toukan and Ali Yousif, Chapters 1, 2 & 3. Video, 4 min. Co-commissioned by Frieze Projects and EMPAC / Experimental Media and Performing Arts Centre at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute.
Storyboard, 2013.
Pencil and carbon transfer on paper.
Coat of Arms and Rocket Project, 2014. (left)
Needles to Rockets, 2009. (right)

Courtesy of the artist and Gypsum Gallery, Cairo
Sewing machines and video 11’30'. Commissioned by PhotoCairo: "The Long Shortcut."
Installation of 12,235 hand-painted metal toy soldiers, installed on 5x5 m base. Commissioned by Home Works ‘5 and the 12th Istanbul Biennial.

Photo by Nathalie Bâthi. Courtesy of the Artist and Istanbul Biennial.
TIN SOLDIERS
2011
Installation of 12,235 hand-painted metal toy soldiers, installed on 5x5 m base.
Commissioned by Home Works ‘5 and ‘98
Tin Soldiers Biennal

Photo by Nathalie Bariki. Courtesy of the Artist and Istanbul Biennial.
TIN SOLDIERS

2012

Book and exhibition project. Installation in the 9th Gwangju Biennale includes found objects and film excerpts in addition to contributions by Cevdet Erek, Dias Ay, Bayane Tabiti, Rita Ponce de Lyon, Maha Maamoun, Raed Bakri, among others.

 Courtesy of the Artist and Gwangju Biennale.
TIN SOLDIERS

2011

Exhibition view at The Ungovernables, New Museum Triennial,
New York. Installation includes found objects and film excerpts in addition to artworks by Cevdet Erek and Doa Aly.

Courtesy New Museum, New York. Photo by Benoit Pailley.
Engagement and dialogue between distinguished individuals who represent a wide set of perspectives, approaches to work, and disciplines has long been the hallmark of The Rockefeller Foundation Bellagio Center resident experience. For decades, the Center has hosted a unique residency program for artists, scholars, scientists, composers, and writers to live in residence, produce new work, and benefit from rich cross-disciplinary exchange.

From 2009-2015, to increase the capacity for outreach to accomplished artists around the world, The Rockefeller Foundation Bellagio Center established the Creative Arts Fellows program. The program brought more than twenty acclaimed artists from across the globe to Bellagio, nominated by an advisory panel of leading international curators, for extended residencies to develop projects inspired by or related to social or global issues.

Having ended the Creative Arts Program, The Rockefeller Foundation Bellagio Center remains committed to bringing in renowned international artists, and now works with regional and international arts outreach partners to attract top artists to the program. For more information about the Bellagio Center, please visit http://www.rockefellerfoundation.org/bellagio-center.