

# The Visual Arts Studies Third Annual Conference 2020-2021

## *The Future Museum in the Future City*

Co-organised by  
**Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art** and  
**Doha Institute for Graduate Studies (DI)**

14 December 2020  
4:00 – 7:00 PM (Doha Time)  
13:00 – 16:00 (GMT)

This webinar will be streamed on Zoom and will be held in English.  
Simultaneous Arabic translation will be provided.

## ABSTRACT

There are turning points in history that we understand in retrospective, in a deferred insight. The current crisis, the pandemic, seems to act differently, for it contains an acute awareness that it is a major disjuncture between two eras, two regimes of human existence. Inherent to this tragic experience of a 'major break' is the orientation towards the future, loosely defined. The cultural fields of production are doubly bounded in these tragic experiences. They are one of the most affected domains by the current events, which has deep and lasting effects on them. And, those most affected fields are expected to tell the story of this transition between the two regimes of existence. 'The Story of the Pandemic' is partly constituted by ways of narrating the future to come, the nature of the unfolding new regime(s).

Of the different cultural fields at the center of these processes, are the city and the museum. Traditionally, the modern city constructed the museum as its mirroring mechanism. It was supposed to tell the story of the city via different media, e.g. visually, architecturally, and temporally. Fortunately, it did more than just telling a story, it has been reshaping the city and its dwellers. At the current juncture, both the city and the museum have been deeply implicated in the tragic experiences and are being radically transformed. Part and parcel of this transformation is that the city and the museum are narrating the moment of transformation as it occurs. And, thus they are both active in shaping the 'future' of the coming regime of human existence.

These current dynamics of the 'urgent' now force certain challenges on us. What are the shapes and the practices of the socio-political regimes that we foresee? What type of agency could we carve in these emerging regimes? Is the biosphere the determining factor after all? What would the city based on the new biopolitics look like? And, the museum? Do these scenarios entail ways of visually narrating them? Could one resist these unfolding changes, and how?

## PROGRAMME

Time	Programme
4:00 – 4:15 PM	<p><b>Introduction</b></p> <p><b>Welcoming Remarks:</b>  <b>Prof. Amal Ghazal</b>, Dean of the School of Social sciences and Humanities, (DI)</p> <p><b>Opening Remarks:</b>  <b>Abdellah Karroum</b>, Director of Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art</p> <p><b>Ismail Nashef</b>, Associate Professor, Doha Institute for Graduate Studies (DI)</p>
4:15 – 5:30 PM	<p><b>Discussion 1:</b> Introduced by <b>Ismail Nashef</b> with</p> <p><b>Vasif Kortun</b>, Curator</p> <p><b><i>Speaking from the Antechamber: A Generous Institutional Subjectivity</i></b></p> <p><b>Noor abu Arafah</b>, Artist</p> <p><b><i>On How to Remember: Towards an Immaterial Museum</i></b></p> <p><b>Q&amp;A</b></p>
5:30 – 7:00 PM	<p><b>Discussion 2:</b> Introduced by <b>Abdellah Karroum</b> with</p> <p><b>John Akomfrah</b>, Artist and Filmmaker</p> <p><b><i>The Unintended Beauty of Disaster</i></b></p> <p><b>Amal Alhaag</b>, Curator and Researcher</p> <p><b><i>Speculative Side-Steppers: the Museum must not hold</i></b></p> <p><b>Q&amp;A</b></p>
7:00 PM	<p><b>Closing Remarks</b></p> <p><b>Abdellah Karroum</b>, Director of Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art</p> <p><b>Ismail Nashef</b>, Associate Professor, Doha Institute for Graduate Studies</p>

## BIOGRAPHIES

### Amal Alhaag

Amal Alhaag is an Amsterdam-based curator, researcher and co-founder of several initiatives, including Metro54, a platform for experimental sonic, dialogic and visual culture and the Side Room: a room for eccentric practices and people together with artist Maria Guggenbichler (2013-2016). Alhaag develops ongoing experimental and collaborative research practice, public programs and projects on global spatial politics, archives, colonialism, counter-culture, oral histories and popular culture. Her projects and collaborations with people, initiatives and institutions invite, stage, question and play with 'uncomfortable' issues that riddle, rewrite, remix, share and compose narratives in impermanent settings. Alhaag is currently part of the curatorial team of the quadrennial sonsbeek 2020-2024 in Arnhem, Netherlands; senior public program and research curator at the Research Center for Material Culture, Netherlands and curatorial and research consultant at Mathaf, Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha, Qatar.

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### John Akomfrah

John Akomfrah (born 1957, London) is a hugely respected artist and filmmaker living and working in London. His works are characterised by their investigations into memory, post-colonialism, temporality and aesthetics and often explores the experiences of migrant diasporas globally. Akomfrah was a founding member of the influential Black Audio Film Collective, which started in London in 1982 alongside the artists David Lawson and Lina Gopaul. Their first film, *Handsworth Songs* (1986) explored the events surrounding the 1985 riots in Birmingham and London through a charged combination of archive footage, still photos and newsreel. The film won several international prizes and established a multi-layered visual style that has become a recognisable motif of Akomfrah's practice. Other notable works include *The Unfinished Conversation*, (2012) and *The Vertigo Sea*, (2015). Akomfrah has had numerous solo exhibitions most recently Seattle Art Museum, Seattle, WA, USA (2020); Secession, Vienna, Austria (2020); BAL TIC, Gateshead, UK (2019); ICA Boston, MA, USA (2019); amongst several others.

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### Noor abu Arafah

Noor Abuarafah, (born 1986, Palestine) is a contemporary artist who lives and works between Jerusalem and Cairo. Noor Abuarafah works with video, performance and text. Her projects deal with memory, history and archives and the possibility of tracking down absences. Noor's videos and performances are based on texts and call the complexity of history into question: how it is formed, constructed, made, perceived, visualized and understood. She asks how all these elements are related and investigates the possibility of representing the past when there are gaps in the documentation. Her videos and socially-engaged works are based on interviews, workshops and other participatory activities. Noor Abuarafah holds an MA from the ECAV (CH) and a BA from the Bezalel Academy for Arts and Design, Jerusalem. In 2016, she was one of the finalists for the Emerging Voices Award and was awarded the second place in the Young Palestinian Artist Award of the Qattan Foundation. Recently Noor participated in the following exhibitions: 11th BerlinBinnale (2020); Sharjah Biennale 13 (2017); amongst many others.

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## Amal Ghazal

Amal Ghazal is a Professor of History. She earned her BA from the American University of Beirut and her MA and PhD from the University of Alberta. She was a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Toronto before joining Dalhousie University in 2006. In 2017, she moved to Simon Fraser University as the Director of the Centre for Comparative Muslim Studies. She joined the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies in September 2020 as the Dean for the School of Social Sciences and Humanities. She specializes in modern Arab history and in the history of Muslim societies in Africa. She has published on a variety of topics and has covered different regions, from the Mediterranean, to the Indian Ocean to the Sahara.

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## Abdellah Karroum

Abdellah Karroum, Director of Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art in Doha since 2013, is also the founder and artistic director of a number of art initiatives, including L'appartement 22 in Rabat, and has curated numerous exhibitions, such as, most recently, "*Our World Is Burning*" (2020) at Palais de Tokyo, Paris; "*Revolution Generations*" (2018), "*Shakir Hassan Al Said: The Wall*" (2017), *Wael Shawky: Crusades and Other Stories* (2015), Farid Belkahia: *Aube(s)* (2015), and *Shirin Neshat: Afterwards* (2014), all at Mathaf. He was artistic director of *Inventing the World: The Artist as Citizen* for the Biennale Benin (2012), curator of *Sous nos yeux [Before Our Eyes]* at La Kunsthalle de Mulhouse (2013) and at the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (2014), and associate curator of *Intense Proximity* for La Triennale, Paris (2012). Other curatorial and research projects include the *Sentences on the Banks and other activities* at Darat Al-Funun, Amman (2010); *A Proposal for Articulating Works and Places* for the 3rd Biennale of Marrakech (2009); the R22 art experimental web radio station established in 2007; Le Bout Du Monde art expeditions (ongoing since 2000); the *Editions hors'champs* series of art publications established in 1999.

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## Vasif Kortun

Vasif Kortun is a curator, writer and teacher in the field of contemporary visual art, its institutions, and spatial practices. He was the founding director of Research & Programs of SALT, an interdisciplinary cultural institution in Turkey. A recipient of the Award for Curatorial Excellence from Bard College, Kortun has co-curated biennials including the Taipei (2008) with ManRay Hsu, and the 9th Istanbul Biennial (2005) with Charles Esche. The second volume of his collected writings, *20*, was published in 2018.

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## Ismail Nashef

Ismail Nashef is an associate professor at the anthropology and sociology program, Doha Institute for Graduate Studies. He held academic positions in different universities in the Arab World and beyond. In addition to his academic career, he is a literary and art critic, and curator. He has initiated and participated in different cultural and academic projects in the academia and elsewhere. His research focus is on materiality, language, and ideology. He explores these topics as they are manifested and expressed in literature and visual arts. His current research is on visual arts and literature in the colonial contexts, with special attention to the Arab Islamic societies, generally, and the Palestinian one, particularly. His latest publications include: *Ruins: Expressing al Nakbah* (2019); *Arabic: A story of a colonial mask* (2018); *June's Childhood: Dar al Fata al Arabi and the genres of tragedy* (2016); *Images of the Palestinian Death* (2015); *On Palestinian Abstraction: Zohdy Qadry and the Geometrical Melody of Late Modernism* (2014).

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