

# Losing Ground: On Disappeared Art Institutions And Their Ghosts

Mounira Al Solh, Line Ajan, Virginie Bobin, Salma Mochtari

A joint inquiry by Qalqalah قلقلة and NOA (Not Only Arabic)

Over the last years, we observed the emergence and disappearance of small-scale, independent artistic institutions, who strove to create conditions for artistic research and labor to thrive; while encouraging communal encounters and social interventions in their respective contexts. Often initiated by artists and curators, these institutions relied on fragile economies, which may partly explain their short lifespan. Despite that, they managed to leave a durable imprint on their local community as well as on global art audiences who sometimes did not even visit them physically. Without the means to maintain archives, the afterlives of these institutions depend on individual memories; scattered traces; hearsay; and the ghosts they left behind.

How were these initiatives created, why and for whom? What kind of model did they seek to propose, in relation to what artistic institutions represent, permit and foreclose? What local and transnational bonds did they generate? What mythologies did they produce, in which languages? Why did they close and what does remain of the activities, objects, ideas and relationships they generated? Lastly, who gets to tell their stories?

Qalqalah قلقلة and artist Mounira Al Solh (co-founder of the performative magazine NOA and the independent space Modka Beirut in Zuitphen, The Netherlands) are similarly engaged in a daily practice of instituting — of creating the means for ourselves and others to work together and support each other, outside from, yet in dialogue with, artistic and educational institutions. Hence our interest in gathering and sharing the stories of our forebearers, tending for their ghosts, acknowledging their influence and the possible models they continue to embody for self-organizing and commoning in a highly neo-liberal and violent world. Our inquiry is also a pretext to initiate conversations and bonds, strengthen solidarities and forge tools to act upon this world.

This project was initiated during a residency at BUDA Arts Center in Kortrijk, Belgium (2022-2023).

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In July 2023, *Losing Ground* takes the form of a public program, in the frame of the Feminist School of apap – FEMINIST FUTURES, a project co-funded by the Creative Europe Programme of the European Union.

Saturday July 1 to Sunday July 9

Video Exhibition

Curated by Line Ajan and Salma Mochtari

With works by Salim Bayri, Walid Raad,  
Ghita Skali and Emma Wolukau-Wanambwa



Walid Raad, *Les Louvres. Sections 7, 11 and 17*, 2019. Single channel video, color, sound, 17:41 min. Video still. Courtesy of the artist & Sfeir-Semler Gallery Beirut/Hamburg.

Saturday July 1 at 5.30pm

A NOA magazine inter-twined performance

Lara Pigorsch and Yasmin Moalem  
with Mounira Al Solh

Duration: 25 mins  
Partially and gently interactive

Artists Lara Pigorsch and Yasmin Moalem met in Mounira Al Solh's performance class at the School of Fine Arts in Kassel. There, Lara Pigorsch has been experimenting with forms of collaboration via bodily soothing and inter-weaving gestures; and Yasmin Moalem has recently been exploring short poems, uttered in plural mother tongues, as a performative gesture.

In line with their bodily and verbal works, the two of them come into a dialogue, inspired by the third edition of NOA Magazine, revolving around language and prejudice. Initiated by Mounira Al Solh, NOA #3 developed

around the years during which the artist had to pass a Dutch Integration Exam, during a migration process that lasted at least a decade. In doing so, Lara and Yasmin's collaboration extends into sharing a need for collaborative spaces, that might contain and allow intangible practices, such as time based performances. Extending those spaces across various contexts such as art schools, art institutions, festivals, and temporary artist-run spaces, they act as pop-up practices, gently intruding institutional settings.

Yasmin Moalem is a German-Iranian artist with a background in political science and activism. In her art, she explores and analyses political and individual topics such as socio-economic correlations, experiences as a first generation migrant in Germany and the relation to her inner self.

Lara Pigorsch is a choreographer and visual artist. After her state training as a contemporary dancer, she studied art, music and media studies. Since 2020 she has been studying visual arts at the Kunsthochschule Kassel in the performance class. She worked as a choreographer and dancer at documenta 15 and her work *Isolation* was awarded at the Vibra Video Festival program.

Sunday July 2 from 11am to 1pm

Collective Conversation

With Azar Mahmoudian, Marnie Slater,  
Mounira Al Solh, Line Ajan and Virginie Bobin

During this conversation, curator Azar Mahmoudian (co-organiser of *kaf* and initiator of the school, *For a Summer Yet to Come* in Tehran), artist Marnie Slater (co-founder of Buenos Tiempos Int. and Mothers & Daughters — A Lesbian and Trans Bar\* in Brussels, and a former worker at Objectif Exhibition in Antwerp), artist Mounira Al Solh (co-initiator of NOA magazine and of the artist-run space *Modka Beirut* in Zutphen) and curators Line Ajan and Virginie Bobin (from the Qalqalah قلقله collective) will revisit different experiences of setting up, activating, funding, maintaining, protecting as well as closing down independent project spaces and collectives. How were these various initiatives shaped, namely in response to the surrounding political contexts? Who constituted them and how did they impact the bodies of their members? Who did they wish to address and how did they play along, or refuse, imperatives of visibility, efficiency and communication? How can we mourn them when they come to closure? How do their memories resonate with, and continue to inform, our ways of operating in the arts and the affective bonds that weave through them?

Azar Mahmoudian is an independent curator and educator. She runs the summer school, *For a Summer Yet to Come*, in Tehran and nearby places. Her other attempts with self-organised spaces and study gatherings include co-organising *kaf* (Tehran, 2010-2015), and the multi-chapter programs, *Staging a Change and Shifting Panoramas* (Tehran and Berlin, 2017-2020).

Marnie Slater (b. Aotearoa New Zealand) is a visual artist who lives in Brussels. She is co-curator of Buenos Tiempos, Int. and a team member of Mothers & Daughters – A Lesbian and Trans Bar\*. Marnie is currently teaching on the AdMa program at St Lucas School of Art, Antwerp, where she is also undertaking a year-long research project on process tools for queer, feminist and anti-racist collaborative art making.

Info & registration [here](#).

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The fruits of our inquiry will later be published in the 5th issue of *NOA* and in *Qalqalah* قلقله.

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#### Mounira Al Solh

Mounira Al Solh is a visual artist embracing video and video installations, painting and drawing, embroidery, and performative gestures. Narration, story-telling are engaged and committed to an ongoing witnessing in feminist issues, wars, languages and mother-tongues, migrations, and a constant search for the self, as part or as opposed to social and cultural obligations and imposed contexts. She lives and works between Lebanon and The Netherlands.

#### Virginie Bobin

Virginie Bobin develops collaborative projects that take the forms of exhibitions, publications, workshops, seminars, texts, translations or ongoing conversations with artists, curators, researchers, performers and art students. She is particularly interested in a feminist approach to translation as a feminist practice of unlearning with others, which is at the core of her PhD-in-practice research at the Akademie der bildenden Künste (Vienna, 2018-2023).

In 2018, she co-founded *QALQALAH* قلقله, an editorial and curatorial platform dedicated to the production, translation and circulation of artistic, theoretical and literary research in French, Arabic and English. Before that, she was Head of Programs at Villa Vassilieff, a Paris-based center for art, research and residencies, which she co-created in 2016. Previously, she worked for Bétonsalon – Center for Art and Research (Paris), Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art (Rotterdam), Manifesta Journal (Amsterdam), Les Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers and Performa (New York). Recent curatorial projects include the exhibition and workshops series "Bestiario de Lengüitas," with artist Mercedes Azpilicueta (CAC Brétigny, 2021; Museion Bolzano, 2020; CentroCentro Madrid, 2019); and "QALQALAH قلقله: plus d'une langue," co-curated with Victorine Grataloup (La Kunsthalle Mulhouse, 2021; CRAC Occitanie Sète, 2020). She is a member of Textwork's editorial committee.

#### Line Ajan

Line Ajan is an independent curator based between Chicago and Paris. In 2018, she completed her MA in Art History at the University Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne. Her research interest were then oriented towards the appropriation of vernacular photographs in contemporary artistic practices. She notably wrote her master's thesis on the experimental period of the Arab Image Foundation (1997-2004) under the direction of Michel Poivert. Between 2015 and 2019, she worked at Galerie Imane Farès in Paris, where she participated in the organization of the first exhibitions of Sinzo Aanza, Alia Farid, James Webb and the artist collective On-Trade-Off, amongst others, in Paris. She also assisted in the edition of Emeka Ogboh's second monograph, *Lagos Soundscapes*, published by Kerber Verlag. In parallel, she conducted several long interviews, published in the online magazine *Figure Figure*, with young artists based in Paris.

In 2019-2020, she is the recipient of the Barjeel Global Fellowship at the Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA) Chicago, Illinois. At MCA Chicago, she is preparing a screening program for the exhibition *Alien VS Citizen* and is organizing the exhibition *The Location of Lines* which will take place at the MCA between August 2020 and March 2021. In 2019, she joined the editorial committee of *Qalqalah* قلقله association, a platform for artistic exchange, research and translations.

#### Salma Mochtari

Salma Mochtari is a researcher and curator based in Marseille. A member of the curatorial and editorial collective *Qalqalah* قلقله since December 2020, she is a since 2022 affiliated with the research cooperative of Clermont Métropole's art school. Her research often stems from the conceptual circulations between the fields of art and contemporary philosophy. Based on the specific cases of archival absence and black studies, she works the present and future genealogies between contemporary, decolonial and queer critical studies, with the heritage of thinkers such as Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida or Judith Butler. In addition to discursive programming, her curatorial practice is based on forms of collective production through workshops, translation or fiction writing.

In the autumn of 2022, she is conducting with Qalqalah قلقله a research residency on institutional disappearances jointly with artist Mounira al Solh and curator Line Ajan at the Kunstencentrum Buda (Belgium), and a discursive program with curator Virginie Bobin on the politics of truth-telling at Tanzquartier in Vienna (Austria).

She studied the management of artistic institutions at HEC Paris, and contemporary philosophy at the University of Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne and the University of Paris Nanterre. Between 2020 and 2022, she collaborated with KADIST Paris as discursive curator, where she developed editorial and curatorial programming rooted in the political and societal issues of contemporary artistic practices.

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<https://qalqalah.org/en/activities/losing-ground>