

Losing Ground: On Disappeared Art Institutions And Their Ghosts

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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 will notably develop during a residency at BUDA Arts Center in Kortrijk, Belgium (2022-2023) in the frame of the Feminist School of apap – FEMINIST FUTURES, a project co-funded by the Creative Europe Programme of the European Union. It will notably take the form of a public program at BUDA during the Almost Summer / Feminist Future Festival in July 2023.

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

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 قَلْقَلَة, 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 Vassiliev, 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 قَلْقَلَة: 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 Ogbob'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 قَلْقَلَة 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 قَلْقَلَة 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 قَلْقَلَة 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.

