

Lawrence Abu Hamdan: For
the Otherwise Unaccounted

Support Materials

OCT 14 - DEC 11, 2021

AUDAIN GALLERY

Exhibition Text

Lawrence Abu Hamdan is best known for investigating the politics of sound, whether that be “earwitness” accounts gathered from prisoners tortured at Syria’s Saydnaya prison under Assad’s regime, or critiques of the use of accent tests to validate asylum claims in Europe. Through works of video, sculpture, performance, and installation, Abu Hamdan persistently interrogates the interpretive limits and truth claims of audio information. He studies how sound roots itself in memory, how it is inseparable from vision, and ultimately, as the artist states, how it is uncontainable: “part of the messiness of the world.”

This solo exhibition presents the first iterations of Abu Hamdan’s body of work exploring reincarnation as a medium for justice. In the gallery, visitors encounter *Once Removed* (2019), a dual-channel video installation chronicling the artist in conversation with Bassel Abi Chahine, a 31 year old writer and historian who has amassed a startlingly comprehensive inventory of rare objects, photographs and interviews of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) from the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990). Abi Chahine’s obsessive collection and research was pursued to help contextualize what he describes as unexplainable memories and flashbacks of a war he was not alive to experience. Through the course of his archiving, Abi Chahine recognizes himself as the reincarnation of a young soldier, Yousef Fouad Al Jawhary, who was killed during the conflict on February 26, 1984, at the age of 17.

Since the close of the Lebanese Civil War, it was deemed in the national interest to suppress details about the conflict in order to avoid inciting further tensions. Abu Hamdan and Abi Chahine’s generation, therefore, grew up with very little knowledge about the war, and were actively discouraged from seeking it out. Yet former PLA soldiers desired to share their personal photographs and artefacts with Abi Chahine because they believed him to be

the reincarnation of their comrade. As the scenography of *Once Removed* suggests, Abi Chahine's research and his reincarnation are inextricably entangled.

Audain Gallery's street-facing windows present *For the Otherwise Unaccounted* (2020), a series of vinyl prints and text panels that draw upon the work of psychiatrist Dr. Ian Stevenson, particularly his 1997 book *Reincarnation and Biology: The Etiology of Birthmarks*. Resulting from extensive fieldwork across Asia and Africa, and in Turkey, Lebanon, and Alaska, *Reincarnation and Biology* explores claims of reincarnation in which birthmarks on reincarnated subjects correspond to circumstances of their deaths in previous lives. Entwining forensic analysis, scientific hypotheses and narrative prose, Stevenson's book examines a community of people around the world for whom violence and injustice have otherwise escaped the historical record. Abu Hamdan's prints of birthmarks, adhered directly to the window glass and casting shadows of themselves on the walls behind them, highlight the ways in which testimony is stored in the body. Birthmarks become archives: the only surviving remnants of such historical erasure and endured traumas as forced religious conversions, the destruction of language and property and colonial occupation. In this way, Abu Hamdan's new work attempts to make both visible and audible a new category of witness, one that has yet to be accepted into the generation of history.

This exhibition is co-presented by SFU's School for the Contemporary Arts' Audain Visual Artist in Residence program.

List of Works

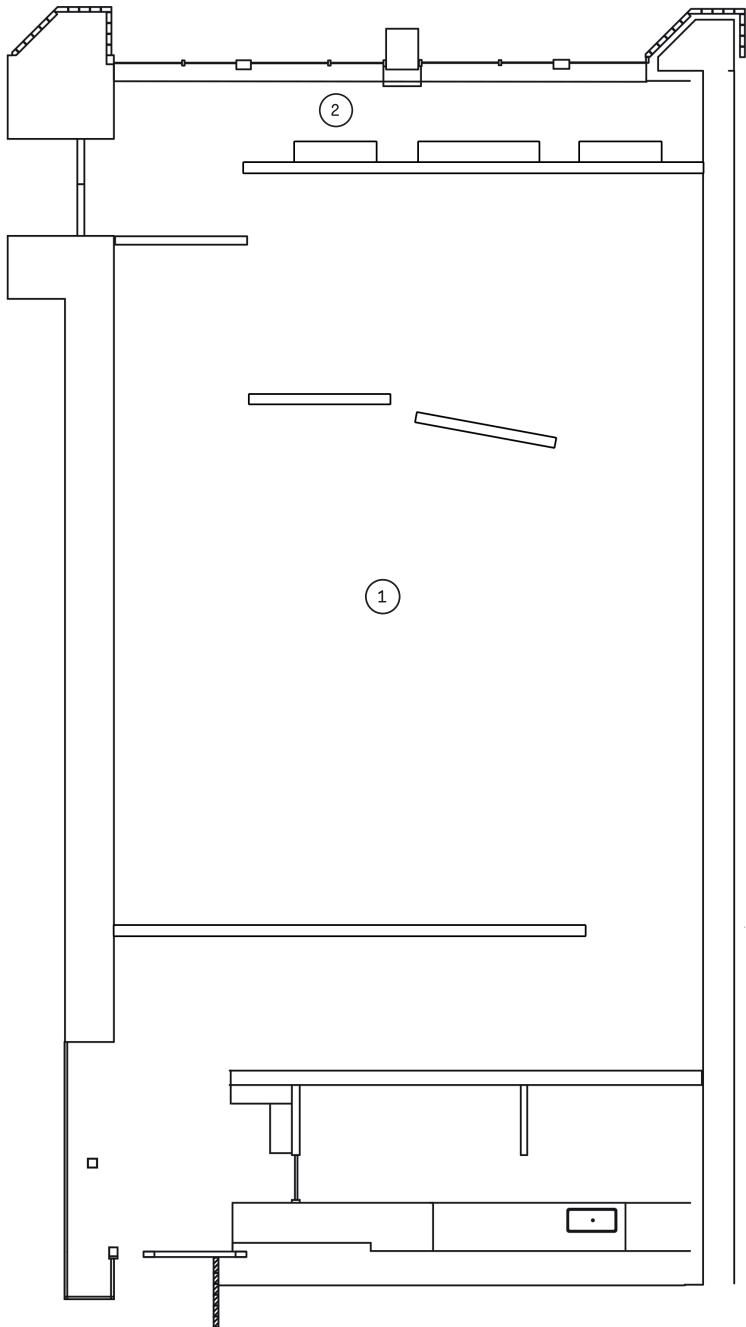
1.

Lawrence Abu Hamdan
Once Removed, 2019
HD video with sound
28 mins
Courtesy the artist and Maureen
Paley, London

2.

Lawrence Abu Hamdan
For the Otherwise Unaccounted,
2020
vinyl prints and text panels, shelf
42 x 24 cm (text panels)
234 x 55 cm (shelves)
Courtesy the artist and Maureen
Paley, London

Exhibition Map



Bibliography

Texts on the Artist

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Ina Dinter, ed., Lawrence Abu Hamdan. *The Voice before the Law: Catalog zur Ausstellung im Hamburger Bahnhof*, Berlin 2019/2020 (Germany: Wienand Verlag & Medien, 2019).

Greg Elmer and Stephen J Neville, "The Resonate Prison: Earwitnessing the Panacoustic Affect," *Surveillance & Society* 19, no. 1 (2021): 11–21.

Kareem Estefan, "Lawrence Abu Hamdan," 4columns.org (September 27, 2019).

Solveig Gade, "The Promise of the Index in Contemporary Documentary Performance," *The Nordic Journal of Aesthetics*, no 55–56 (2018), 41–64.

Ben Mauk, "Does Sound Deceive? The Forensic Art of Lawrence Abu Hamdan," *Frieze* (May 27, 2018).

Edgar Schmitz, "Lawrence Abu Hamdan: once removed," kunstforum.de (February 23, 2021).

Fabian Schönbach, ed., Lawrence Abu Hamdan: [inaudible] *A Politics of Listening in 4 Acts* (Frankfurt a.M.: Sternberg Press, 2016).

Mi You, "Taqiyyah, Language and Game: On Lawrence Abu Hamdan's Contra Diction: Speech against itself," *Performative Research* 21:4 (2016): 113–121.

Related Texts

Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester (London: Athlone, 1990).

Gebhard Fartacek, ed., *Druze Reincarnation Narratives: Previous Life Memories, Discourses, and the Construction of Identities* (Austria: Peter Lang Verlag, 2021).

Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved* (USA: Summit Books, 1988).

Walid Sadek, "In the Presence of the Corpse," and "Collecting the Uncanny and the Labour of the Missing," in *The Ruin to Come, Essays from a protracted war* (Motto Books/Taipei Biennial, 2016).

Ian Stevenson, *Reincarnation and Biology: A Contribution to the Etiology of Birthmarks and Birth Defects* (Praeger, 1997).

Frances A. Yates, *The Art of Memory* (New York: Routledge, 1966).

Biography

Currently based in Dubai, Lawrence Abu Hamdan holds a PhD from Goldsmiths College University of London. He was a fellow at the Gray Centre for Arts and Inquiry at the University of Chicago, and the Vera List Centre for Art and Politics at the New School (New York). Abu Hamdan has exhibited his work at the 58th Venice Biennale, the 11th Gwanju Biennale, and the 13th and 14th Sharjah Biennial, as well as at the Witte De With (Rotterdam), Tate Modern Tanks (London), Chisenhale Gallery (London), Hammer Museum (Los Angeles), Portikus (Frankfurt), The Showroom (London), and Casco Art Institute (Utrecht). His works are part of collections at the Museum of Modern Art (New York), Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (New York), Van AbbeMuseum (Eindhoven), Centre Pompidou (Paris), and Tate Modern (London). Abu Hamdan was awarded the 2019 Edvard Munch Art Award, the 2016 Nam June Paik Award for new media, and in 2017 his film Rubber Coated Steel won the Tiger short film award at the Rotterdam International Film Festival. For the 2019 Turner Prize, Abu Hamdan, together with nominated artists Helen Cammock, Oscar Murillo, and Tai Shani, formed a temporary collective in order to be jointly granted the award.

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