that were shamefully swept under the carpet of loss, to unearth answers, to see the personal faces behind the dust, and to find connections to the contemporary.

The artists in the exhibition, Ganzeer, Jeanno Gaussi, Rheim Alkadhi, and Makan Collective (Diala Khasawnih and Samah Hijawi) are, with the exception of Hijawi, outsiders to the intimacy of the conversations and objects collected for this exhibition. Instead, the artists were presented with these stories and mementos to reflect on and work with.

The nonlinear, multidimensional process of imagining and developing the works is as much part of Open Sesame as the final manifestations that will be on display in the show. Although a sincere attempt at documentation, the exhibition will surely add another opaque layer between the present and that moment in 1990.

In an attempt to invite the reader into this process, the following text is a historic narrative of nonlinear stories and memories taken from these conversations, the characters are mixed up, the series of events are collaged, and the scenarios are confused. What is truly left is but a glimpse of that time.

Open Sesame

January 17-March 2, 2013

Ganzeer, Jeanno Gaussi, Rheim Alkadhi, Makan Collective (Diala Khasawnih and Samah Hijawi)

Organized by Ola El-Khalidi

The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait on August 2, 1990, and the Gulf wars that ensued, contributed to violence that is still very much a part of the region today, twenty-two years later. These wars have shaped the future of a generation of teenagers from the region, whom I call the Open Sesame generation, a generation of which I am a part. Now adults, many members of this generation’s lives were dramatically changed by the invasion, in one way or another, and refer to it as a turning point, the end of childhood; the end of the age innocence. The exhibition Open Sesame opens in New York on January 17, 2013; on January 17, 1991, an international force led by the U.S.A. started a war, which became known as the First Gulf War, against Iraq, to reverse the invasion of Kuwait.

“What happened on August 2, 1990?” was the question that instigated the conversational interviews that I conducted with a group of people who were affected by the events of that day, a day that changed everything for them. As part of my own personal history and as a significant episode in the history of the region, these conversations were like zooming in from the contemporary big picture to a segment of the past that is drenched in nostalgia, trauma, and utopianism. These journeys did not only result in conversations, but also in a wealth of objects that their owners kept over the past two decades as souvenirs of lives that ceased to be. These objects, windows to unfathomable unconscious choices in times of crisis, are worthy of their own cabinet of curiosities.

Open Sesame is an attempt to give value to experiences
They had plans to go to Tunisia and Greece. All they could think of on that day, when their mother woke them with “Saddam entered Kuwait!” was that their long awaited summer plans just got canceled. Usually, during the month of August, many of the residents of Kuwait leave for summer vacation to avoid the heat. Those who stayed that year witnessed the invasion.

On a small Greek island with no access to TV or radio, they had been the last to know. They packed their belongings and travelled to Amman, thinking it would just be for a few days before they could go home to Kuwait. Their furnished-apartment landlady in Amman was very welcoming. The kids, brother and sister, spent the days playing UNO, while their parents attempted to manage their new house. The mother ran the house, the breadwinner, while the father worked at a bank in Kuwait and he had all the keys because most of the employees were out of the country. He had to go to the bank for the first time after the invasion but then he just stopped. Her father managed to get food from his friend’s farms in Kuwait. Live chicken was brought to the house; they learned how to pluck it. Her childhood was over when the invasion happened. She could never eat liver again, ever.

The uncle, visiting from the U.S.A. and thinking he was still there, was cleaning the car topless in the street with a backpack on. The mother started crying. He had left the toys behind, but brought the dog and all their VHS videotapes and photo-albums. His face was a list of phone numbers that had become disconnect- ed. Now, with Facebook, she was able to track down some of her old Egyptian friends. They exchanged a few messages reminiscing about the Kuwait days, and shared some stories and pictures from the past twenty-two years. After a few days, with no more to say or share, the exchanges came to an end.

The boy had a collection of Majid magazines (a magazine in Arabic for youth published since 1979), which he was very proud of. On their way out of Kuwait, his mother threw them all out to get rid of any traces of their life in Kuwait.

Thank you for going back in time.

Ganzeer, tabaat we nabat, 2013

In their ’80s Oldsmobile, the family of five drove with a convoy of fifteen cars and trucks. The trip from Kuwait to Amman through Baghdad took four days. Half way through the trip, the younger brother wet himself and the car stank for two days. It was freezing at night. When they arrived to Amman the son shouted “Banan-as!” Kuwait was the land of dreams. They missed the good old days, when everything was available, life was easy, neighbors cared, and families were close. Kuwait had become the utopia of a time that once was.

What happened on August 2, 1990?