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2012-13 Unsolicited Program Project Proposal by

Ola El-Khalidi

Open Sesame: What Happened on August 2nd 1990?

“More than 100,000 Iraqi soldiers backed up by 700 tanks invaded the Gulf state of Kuwait in the early hours of this morning.” BBC on August 2nd, 1990

“On 17 January 1991, coalition forces launched Desert Storm in what would be the longest air strike in the history of aerial warfare.” BBC, On This Day, August 2nd, 1990

Entitled *Iftah ya Simsim* (Open Sesame), this exhibition borrows from the command used to open the cave of treasures in the tale *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves* as well as the Arabic version of *Sesame Street*. Launched in Kuwait in 1979, the tv show shot its outdoor scenes in various Arab cities and its interior shots in Kuwaiti studios. In 1990 and 1991, after Saddam Hussein's (then president of Iraq) invasion of Kuwait on the 2nd of August 1990 and during the first Gulf War that ensued, forty four episodes of the show were aired on national Kuwaiti TV, but with scenes of Iraqi artists and actors edited out. Thus, seventy six episodes were lost and never found.

What happened on August 2nd 1990? This exhibition aims to highlight that specific moment, opening a cave of memories. Because of their governments' positions regarding Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait, hundreds of thousands of Arabs were pushed out of Kuwait in the months that followed the invasion, or were not allowed back in after the summer holidays. For many, they were forced to leave behind unmade beds, food in the fridge, play dates, and meetings. Because of the complexity of that particular exodus, many of the displaced found little support within their new communities, with no choice but to carry on with their lives, their story (trauma) was silenced.

Twenty stories, narrated by people who belong to the *Open Sesame* generation: born in Kuwait between the years 1970-1982, and were forced to resettle with their families in Jordan, Egypt, Syria, Palestine, and as far as the USA and Canada, will be collected by the *Makan* collective, physically based in Amman, Jordan. Both Samah Hijawi and Ola El-Khalidi, members of the collective, were born and raised in Kuwait, and life as they knew it changed in the summer of 1990, re-settling with their families in Amman, Jordan.

This project invites four cartoonists and graphic novelists to respond to five stories each in the form of a cartoon slip or a mini graphic novel. The artists are Joe Sacco (USA), Marjane Satrapi (Iran), Ganzeer (Egypt), and the *Samandal* collective (Lebanon). The exhibition, using those works, will present a document that attempts at capturing this moment of history, a past and lost event. While the present tension and envisaged war in the same region is being documented by all sorts of media including social networking platforms, this is a step back in time to an instant of war and dislocation that has not yet received its appropriate documentation, narrativization, and exploration.

291 church st. nyc, ny 10013
p: 212.431.5270 f: 646.827.2487
info@apexart.org; www.apexart.org