

apexart

2023-24 INTL Proposal

submitted February 2022

Exhibition City: Cairo, Egypt

The Valley of Walls submitted by: Farida Youssef

Between 2021 and 2022, four multi-generational artists fell upon Ahmed Ali Kamal's personal archive. He became Egypt's minister of water resources and irrigation in the 1970's and left behind an archive of photographs, letters, documents and curiously an abandoned apartment. These pertain to the Nile Valley, dams, sewage system, agriculture and hydro-electrical solutions to ecological problems that had not yet appeared. Today, these are more relevant than ever. A dormant discourse on the environment awaits to be awakened.

The exhibition aims to present the artists' unveiling of that archive as an artistic and ecological intervention. In the 'Valley of Walls' each of the artists chose one component from the archive and created a site-specific multi-media installation through their reflection. These will be exhibited in the abandoned apartment where Kamal once lived, along with a display of the archive of which it is a part. Challenging the idea of a historic house museum, this exhibition engages with the archive and the apartment not as a time capsule but rather as a hyperobject, 'massively distributed in time and space' whose effects are constantly felt (Morton 2013). Just as the High Dam, responsible for managing water, is always present in Egyptians' daily life, the installations in this exhibition transform the archive into an immersive environment to achieve this effect.

Hany Rashed explores the personal letters written by Kamal during his travels along the Nile. Extracts from these letters will be painted on mid-century furniture left in the apartment. Rashed's painting practice is akin to a staging of the letters, as if the furniture was acting out a (hyper)archive.

Malak Yacout chose to work on the recurring pattern of crossing-out of words in the archive. She reinterprets those onto various architectural surfaces, like glass or wood flooring, to question the truth within the archive.

Mohamed ElMaghraby presents studies of the 1960s' High Dam technical drawings. These rare drawings are animated and projected inside of built-in cabinets in one room of the apartment and, paired with a soundtrack imagining what these machines emit.

Nada Baraka is working the painterly qualities of dust. The furniture in the apartment left traces on the walls which Baraka plans to use as elements of her wall paintings which will be accompanied by an assemblage of found frames. This ushers the persona of the house and its inhabitants.

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Through the medium of site-specific installations, the exhibition intends to blur the boundary between process and final outcome. This is an invitation for the audience to experience the exhibition as a collaboration between the artists and the apartment-as-environment, to feel a resurrected history more profoundly.

The 'Valley of Walls' is a uniquely aesthetic access to an archive of urgent significance. It will be accompanied by a set of public programming, including workshops for art students and community about the importance of archival research together with talks for a general audience about environmental history in twentieth century Egypt.

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