

PRESS RELEASE

FRAGMENTS

Meeting Architecture

A programme of lectures and exhibitions

Friday 12 February 2016: Part I

Akram Zaatari: The Archaeology of Rumour

18.00: Lecture introduced by Ludovico Pratesi

19.30: Exhibition opening

Exhibition open from 12 February to 4 March

The British School at Rome
via Gramsci 61, Rome

Akram Zaatari's lecture and exhibition *The Archaeology of Rumour* is the second event in *Meeting Architecture: FRAGMENTS* curated by Marina Engel.

FRAGMENTS will consider how memories, emotions and ideologies are constantly tied to ruins, buildings and their contents. To this end the programme will focus on the concept of the fragment, defined as an urban ruin, a house and/or its remaining contents, personal vestiges, images, photographs, and documents. Architects, visual artists and historians will examine and reevaluate the fragment in an attempt to reconstruct personal or collective identities in zones of conflict or former conflict, demonstrating how the meanings and memories we attach to our experiences are to a greater or lesser degree tied to their physical manifestation.

The lecture and exhibition *The Archaeology of Rumour* focuses on the theme of the letter in war times, which Akram Zaatari uses both as the subject (the document) and as the form of his works. Letters that have been lost, found, buried, discovered, or

otherwise delayed in reaching their destinations is the subject of several of the artist's works.

The BSR exhibition presents two videos: *In this House* (2005) which is about the excavation of a letter and *Letter to a Refusing Pilot* (2013) which is addressed to an Israeli former pilot.

Akram Zaatari often refers to the way his architectural training influences how he looks at the world, and the attention he gives to objects and documents in writing his histories. Archaeology is frequently invoked as a metaphor for connecting to the past and to the collection of fragments: stories, rumors, personal recollections, images, photographs and documents from across the Lebanon.

One of the artist's concerns in amassing this wealth of material is to investigate the nuances between the official and the politicised versions of events and how histories can be retold and rebuilt on a more personal level by the people who lived through them.

***Letter to a Refusing Pilot* (2013), 35'**

The setting for the work is a school that was bombed and severely damaged during one of the Israeli invasions of Lebanon, a source of material for many of Zaatari's works. In 1982, a rumour circulated in his hometown, Saida, that an Israeli fighter had been ordered to bomb a target but he refused the order and instead dumped his bombs into the sea. The building was eventually bombed by another pilot.

Akram Zaatari grew up with memories of the ruined school and ever more elaborate versions of the story since his father had been the director of the school. Years later, Zaatari was to learn that the story was true and that the pilot, having trained as an architect, realised that the building was probably a school and refused to bomb it. *Letter to a Refusing Pilot* describes an impossible correspondence across enemy borders; a letter from a Lebanese boy to an Israeli pilot that can only be delivered through an artwork.

The film, shot in the rebuilt area around the school, incorporates aerial views, photographs, drawings and personal documents from Zaatari's and his family's life to tell the story again from the perspective of a teenage boy.

***In this House* (2005), 30'**

The setting for *In this House* is also a building, in this case, a little white house; a family home with an olive tree on a plot of land.

Following the Israeli withdrawal from Ain el Mir in 1985, the village became the frontline. The Dagher family was displaced from that home, which was later occupied by Lebanese

resistance fighters until the end of the war in 1991. Before leaving the house, Ali, one of those fighters, wrote a letter to the family justifying his occupation, telling them how he had looked after the house for them, and welcoming them back home. Placing the letter inside the empty case of a B-10, 82mm mortar, he buried it in the garden. Years later, Zaatari interviewed Ali and, on hearing the story, departed to Ain el Mir to “excavate” the letter.

In this House is a four screen video. One screen is dedicated to Ali, who tells his story and describes his long stay in the house. A second screen presents a number of his personal possessions including his diary, photographs and newspaper clippings of the time. The third screen focuses on the excavation of the letter by a gardener, watched by an increasingly curious crowd who the audience hears off screen. The family members, neighbours and Lebanese intelligence officers decline to be filmed. Finally a fourth screen presents a diagrammatic sketch of who is talking off screen together with an English translation of their dialogue. The discovery of the letter allows both the family and the resistance fighter to reconstruct memories that had literally been buried in the ground.

Akram Zaatari (1966 Saida, Lebanon. Lives and works in Beirut) is an artist who has played a critical role in developing the formal, intellectual, and institutional infrastructure of Beirut's contemporary art scene. In 1997, he co-founded the Arab Image Foundation, a conservation and research institute focusing on vernacular photography. The Foundation has compiled and preserved over half a million professional and amateur photos from the Middle East and North Africa. Zaatari's work has been featured at dOCUMENTA13 in 2012 and at the Venice Biennale in 2013. Recent solo exhibitions include *Salt*, Istanbul and *Unfolding* at the Moderna Museet, Stockholm in 2015.

This programme is in partnership with the Royal Academy of Arts who will host an annual summer forum in London inviting participants in the programme together with RA Academicians to debate some of the main issues discussed in Rome.

CALENDAR 2016

29 April 2016 | Lecture | Francesco Bandarin (Italy) | Architect and Assistant-Director General at UNESCO

Bandarin has worked extensively on heritage sites in conflict zones in Africa and the Middle East. He often lectures on the consequences of the destruction of monuments and heritage sites in these areas and why these ‘crimes against culture’ are now pursued as war crimes by the International Criminal Court. The conference will be hosted by the French Academy in Rome – Villa Medici.

3 May 2016–24 May 2016 | Lecture and exhibition | Dor Guez (Israel) | Visual artist and head of the Photography Department at the Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design, Jerusalem

Guez's installations combine diverse modes of video and photographic practices and raise questions about contemporary art's role in narrating unwritten histories, referring to his own cultural heritage, Christian Palestinian and Jewish-Tunisian. In 2009, Guez founded the Christian-Palestinian Archive (CPA), the first archive devoted to the Christian-Palestinian minority of the Middle East.

30 May 2016 | Lecture | Eyal Weizman (Israel) | Architect and Professor of Spatial and Visual Culture and Director of the Centre for Research Architecture at Goldsmiths, University of London.

An authority on the architecture of Israel's occupation, Weizman recently established Forensic Architecture, a multidisciplinary research project based at Goldsmiths University. Forensic Architecture's investigations provide evidence for international prosecution teams, political organisations, NGOs and the United Nations. In a separate event, Weizman will lead a workshop at MAXXI – Museo nazionale delle arti del XXI secolo.

In 2016-2017, FRAGMENTS will concentrate on Eastern and Central Europe and invite: Miroslaw Balka, Joseph Rykwert, Grzegorz Piątek, Helen Walasek and Dragana Zarevac.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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Opening days: 12 February–4 March 2016, from Tuesday to Saturday

Opening hours: 13.00–18.00

Admission free

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