

2022 RESIDENT FACULTY LECTURE, July 1, 2022

Kota Ezawa: Hey, everyone. I get to go first? {laughter} A pleasure and honor to co-introduce Basel Abbas and Ruanne Abou-Rahme. Yeah, you heard me talk a lot in the last couple weeks, so I'll keep it very short.

Basel and Ruanne have been showing their work in performances, group and solo exhibitions since 2009. Inclu, their work has been included in an impressive list of international biennials, including the Palestinian Pavilion at the 53rd Venice Biennale in 2009, the Liverpool Biennial in 2010, the São Paulo Biennial in 2014, the Guangju Biennale in the same year, and the Sharjah Biennial in 2015, where they received the Biennial Prize. And this is by no means a complete list. Their work has been shown at Kunsthalle in Hamburg, one of my favorite museums, and the Art Institute of Chicago. Their multi-part project *May amnesia never kiss us on the mouth* just closed last week at MOMA, and during the run of the exhibition, there was a string of performances, including a very stirring performance by Basel and Ruanne that you can check out online, and I highly recommend that.

And, one by SCRAAATCH! So I feel SCRAAATCH should have the last word here.
{applause, cheering}

SCRAAATCH: EJ: Thank you so much, Kota. We're really happy to be introducing Basel and Ruanne.

chukwumaa: When we first encountered the work of Ruanne Abou-Rahme and Basel Abbas at the ICA in Philadelphia in 2015, it began unlocking a language to a thing we already felt, but wouldn't be able to name for several more months. The work used video, text, and sound to talk about things like fugivity – fugitivity, state oppression, and interiority. Through their display of their archive for the incidental insurgence, in their 2013 film *The Incidental Insurgence*, the part about the bandits, they seemed to address the stories of the oppressed in a way that Saidiya Hartman might approve of, starting with a concern for interior thought, and motive, in an effort to counter the state erasure of personhood that certain individuals within the state's gaze and power face.

EJ: "There was no doubt about it. All they could be was outlaws. Theirs was a restless spirit in quest of some impossible new dignity." While this text appears as subtitles in the part about the bandits, beautifully given interior motive to the characters in their film, it could just as easily describe the artists themselves. Ruanne and Basel sound an alarm with their work that rumbles instead of blares. It can sometimes feel like their videos, installations, writings, and other work rose up from earth, ruptured, by the loving refusal to be disappeared. They have made a practice of attending to the existences of those who have lived through histories and conditions that some would rather see unacknowledged. What is critical looks and feels different from context to context. Ruanne and Basel understand when to look for what others may be missing, and how to look at what others are misrepresenting.

chukwumaa: Over lunch today, behind the fresco barn, we told Basel and Ruanne that before seeing their work, we didn't know you could be angry in contemporary art. In a way, we didn't know you could be discontented, in mourning, in opposition to widely supported systems, inside of your practice. Their work gives us permission.

EJ: When Ruanne and Basel commissioned a new performance from us, in response to their archive and installation, *May amnesia never kiss us on the mouth*, we were initially blown away by the archive itself. It was clear from this collection of digital ephemera that they had spent some time looking with love for their people online. Caring for their dirges and their protest songs and their resistance rituals. It's a critical attention they bring to all their work.

[in synch] Please everyone, join us in welcoming Ruanne Abou-Rahme {laughing} and Basel Abbas. {applause, cheering}

Basel Abbas: That was amazing, thank you.

Ruanne Abou-Rahme: Yeah. Really special for us, to have you do that, wow. Kind of emotional now. {laughs}

Yeah, you're starting.

Abbas: Okay, so I start. Ah, okay.

So, hello everyone. Thank you for being with us here this evening. And thank you to Sarah and Skowhegan for inviting us to do this lecture. So, our presentation will attempt to go through several recurring threads in our practice, that spills across several works. So rather than present, like, works, we present themes that, like, cross across our works, and like use our works as like examples of those themes. We'll be playing extracts from works throughout the talk. And, yeah, essentially these are ideas and concerns that have kept appearing and re-appearing in our different works, and they, and then there's a mutation that sort of happens to these threads, and so we'll try to kind of follow them.

I'll start by reading a few fragments, and then Ruanne will unpack some ideas from a recent work of ours, and play an extract of video and sound. {clears throat}

"Being in the negative. What does it mean to linger in the lack, to remain in something that is not whole? What if it can be, what if it cannot be made whole again? What if something remains broken, and in the break, we perceive an opening? It is a question of how to be in the thing that's lacking, how to be in the negative and in the loss, and create different possibilities of being and breathing. Breath is rhythm, rhythm is breath. Breath is land, land is breath. The land haunts us, and we haunt them. The shadow, the echo, the ghost of what remains."

Abou-Rahme: Sorry, we're sharing this.

Abbas: We're sharing notes.

Abou-Rahme: This is kind of a small printout, so I have to – I'm gonna start off talking about breath, it's something that comes up in our work a lot, but very particularly in a work that we made in 2019 [slide changes, show begins] entitled *At Those Terrifying Frontiers*, where the disappearance and appearance of people fade into each other. And the work started at a time when people in Gaza, which is to give the background, is a place that's been under siege, it's under military occupation, but it's also been under siege for 2006, which means people cannot leave, and people cannot enter. And it's also one of the most densely populated places on earth. Seventy percent of people living in Gaza are refugees from other parts of historic Palestine, and so, you know, this, this, this work, like, many of our works, really starts from people's practices. And we were very much, you know, watching people start these March of Return that was essentially going to the seam line and basically demanding the right of return to return to the towns or the villages from which they came, which sometimes could be as close by as a half an hour ride away, but they're not allowed to return to them.

And what was really sort of, you know, incredibly powerful, is that people were essentially, you know, going into the field knowing that they could die just by the fact that they were getting so close to this artificial border. And it's really a work where we're trying to think about, or get under the skin of, you know, what does it mean to be a so-called illegal person, or body, or people? So essentially, people are going to the field knowing that they become a moving target. This moment of becoming fugitive is also the moment they are becoming unbound from colonial power, even in a momentary ephemeral way. And that's something you feel very strongly in Palestine, that the moment that you come up against this colonial power, and, which makes you fugitive, essentially, is also the moment in which you are emancipated from it. (00:10:03) And in many ways, for us, the Palestinian condition is one of fugitivity. But we're also thinking about it as a wider condition of how people and refugees become fugitive in the way that they are targeted and killed and incarcerated, and essentially treated like moving targets, unwanted people.

So {clears throat} these were all the things that we were thinking about, and we came across a book that we hadn't read by Edward Said entitled *After The Last Sky*, which is one of his most personal and, and poetic works, and in it, he is really, you know, not only thinking about the sort of geopolitical ideas of, you know, what it means to be Palestinian, but he was really thinking about the existential questions, you know? So very often, when we are discussing or thinking through these issues, we're not necessarily thinking about what does that existentially mean? Right, to be a people that should not exist. To be illegal. And, you know, this work was for us very much about, you know, starting to think about those questions, so, when thinking about the existential questions of what it means to be a people that are constantly being erased, and rendered a non-people, we kept coming back to the idea of breath, and breathing. Obviously, in the most literal sense, the site of the March of Returns was filled with tear gas, and people invented, as you can see, like, all kinds of really incredible masks to be able to resist this tear gas. And to be able to breath where they shouldn't breathe.

But the idea of breath, and breathing, really goes back a long way in our practice. And basically refers to the impossibility of the Palestinian condition, in the sense that you are aware, from a very young age, that your very presence is questioned. That you should not even exist. So it's not just that you are in physical danger in any given moment, but you are also, I mean, of course, and you could be shot and maimed and choked from tear gas, but there is this constant narrative, a material and infrastructural one, through this system of occupation, of colonization, and apartheid, that is all about negating you entirely. And I think that this is the negation that we're trying to get to, where the breath is not just a physical breath, but also an existential question, especially if you're a people that shouldn't exist, or doesn't exist. So it becomes a much deeper question, really, which is a question of being. Breathing where you should not be able to breath is also a question of continuing to be, continuing to claim yourself, to claim space, and your story, and testimony.

So we started to think a lot about how to exist, then, in these impossible conditions. What are the tools that we can use not just to survive but to also generate different possibilities.

And, we ended up creating a script from extracts from the Edward Said book, which is something that we tend to do, is sample either a self-authored or a sample other texts to create scripts, and they were really very, very small fragments. But we also started to think about the avatar. And avatars are something, and masks are something that is also, recurs in our work, and is really about different forms of becoming through performative ritual and practice. Becoming anonymous, the idea of being able to shape shift, or move between times and places, so it's really about a kind of multiplicity of being, for us.

But this was the first project in which we were working with literal avatars, and how we came to this was, you know, we were unable, you know, at the time, we were in Palestine, we were about an hour away by car, from Gaza, but we couldn't get there to participate in these marches, and of course the people in Gaza were trying to break the siege. And the avatar became sort of this space in which we could meet, so we created avatars from single images of the protestors, and essentially then we performed through them, so there is this weird sort of kind of synthesis that happens between us and the avatars. So there's, it sort of feels disembodied, but really it's about re-embodiment, and trying to reach, essentially, our community that we cannot reach.

We're gonna play an extract, but I think it's important to also mention that you'll notice that a lot of the avatars have glitches or scars, so we were using an iPhone app to do this, and because of the nature of the images a lot of them are like low resolution images, basically. The application would render the missing data as scars, or glitches. Sometimes you would have the copyright. And then we discussed this a lot, in terms of like, should we try to fix this, or should we just leave it. And in a way, it became really important for us to not sort of erase this more subtle unseen violence, not just of images and representation, but of the algorithm itself, which is full of all kinds of violences, actually. And in a way, this application had made those violences visible, and given them a physical form.

And the last thing I will say, before playing the extract, is that the script that we created, we ended up singing. {laughs} So that was also not necessarily what we had started out to do, but it became very important in terms of us also kind of embodying the text, so I'll play an extract and then speak a little bit more about it. [video plays 00:16:51 – 00:21:49]

That's to give you a sense, that's an installation shot to give you a sense of how it was installed. It's actually a four-channel work. I'm just gonna read some, I feel like we're going [UNCLEAR], so I'm gonna kind of, yeah. So, just to end, maybe, about this section, something that came up a lot for us here is the idea of mutation. So, the question of how to continue or how to mutate in order to survive in conditions where you should have already died, whether physically or through other forms or kinds of physical violences. So in Palestine, colonial power is exercised not only in the most common shared stratas, but the most intimate and almost minute scales as well. And what we're trying to do is find a way to connect these things, the state of mind, psyche, the state of one's body, and the communal body, to the state of land, air, and water. And most importantly, how can you think of these conditions not just as negative outcomes, but as the very tools from which you create and become unbound from colonial capture, conditions, and time? What would happen if we embraced the idea of being inside something that's broken? And move away from the idea of the politics of fixing or making whole when it cannot always be made whole?

So it's a question that we keep returning to. And I think now Basel will speak about *May amnesia never kiss us on the mouth*, we're actually gonna split that up, but it's gonna start off with, we did an online project that has several parts, with Dia Art Foundation, which will be there for as long as they will take care of it, so you can experience part of it, and we're gonna show a bit of the first thing that we launched with, which is called *Postscript: After Everything is Extracted*, and then we actually did the exhibition, and the performances. So we'll play that, should we play a bit of that?

Abbas: Yeah, yeah.

Abou-Rahme: Do we have time, or?

Abbas: Yeah yeah, we'll play, I'll play a bit of it, and then I'll talk about it a bit.

Abou-Rahme: Yeah.

Abbas: But the idea was, this section is like, we're thinking about, like, rhythm as breath. So I'll play a bit, and then I'll talk about it. So yeah, this is an extract from our website, so it was like --

Abou-Rahme: Yeah, you can --

Abbas: -- it's our website.

Abou-Rahme: -- see it online as well. [video plays 00:24:25 – 00:26:31]

Abbas: If you wanna see more stuff, it's our website, so you can always see it, visiting it, yeah. And I think the extract is way too long now.

So, I'm gonna attempt to give the background to a postscript. So, usually a postscript happens after the work is done, so it's a kind of sort of reflection after you've made the project, only this time we made it actually before finishing the work. We made it during.

So why a postscript? Essentially, this was 2020 – was it 2020? So we were already writing a text about mourning, and around February 2020, in relation to the project, and when the pandemic hit, we were in New York, and for those of you who were in New York in March of 2020, you probably know how bad things got. Essentially, you know, we happen to live next to a hospital, and so, you know, you had sirens all night. You couldn't sleep from the sirens, and there was just death all around. And, coming from Palestine, like, we know that feeling very well, we can sense it, and, you know, how, you know. So it was, yeah, and like I said, we were already writing a text about that perpetual state of mourning in relation to our lives in Palestine, and being Palestinian. So, we really couldn't just go on and pretend like nothing had happened, so it was really important for us to linger in that moment, and sort of, yeah, it, so that, that moment became the postscript to the project, in a way. So, and also became a way we were moving through the grief itself, in that moment. Essentially, we found ourselves thinking about a recurring question that keeps coming back, you know? What happens when you linger in the broken once again, rather than try to heal it? How do you then generate not just a mode of survival, but something more?

The project, *May amnesia* itself, which this is a postscript for, begins with a collection of videos we collected online, mostly from Iraq, Syria, and Palestine, of people singing or dancing in their homes or on the streets. So these were not professional singers, or dancers, but just everyday people doing it in their living room. And, in the beginning, we didn't know why we were collecting this material, and why we were so drawn to it. And our intention wasn't to collect them either, it was more just like, more of a practicality thing, you know, we were sort of, the amnesia quality of the internet made it very hard for us to find certain videos. So I would see something, and I would want to show it to Ruanne the next day, and there was so much material coming out of the places that we were looking at that we couldn't search for it and find it. So we began, like, downloading those videos, just for the sake of having them, really.

So, this was about ten years ago, actually, and at a later point we started to understand what was actually drawing us to this material, and these everyday moments of song and dance, and their, most importantly, also their documentation and proliferation online by people were basically one of the last ways, or we saw it as one of the last ways that these communities that were under threat were holding onto themselves and their communities and their spaces. (00:30:14) So this sort of, like, impromptu dance, and singing, was a way that people were holding onto their communities. And this material was also increasing, so, you know, with, especially in places like Iraq and Syria and Palestine, where communities are constantly under threat of erasure.

So, I'll read a bit of, like, text that we did on the project. So, "the project begins with a collection of online recordings of unknown figures, mostly from Palestine, Iraq, and Syria, performing through song, music, and dance, either in the intimacy of their homes or on the street, in the square, at a wedding, or on a beach having just found refuge. It examines the place and significance of voice in the form of song and oral poetry, and body in the form of dance and gesture as a political act of embodiment and becoming in a moment marked by various forms of violence against entire living fabrics. The project repositions these moments as a material witness inscribed through body, movement, rhythm, and voice, to the destruction of everyday life that is occurring or has occurred."

So essentially, we saw these as resistance practices. And the project, you know, a lot of our work sort of really looks at people's practices, and honors these practices and tries to push them in different directions, and open them up to, yeah, to other possibilities. So, also, "these songs, and these everyday moments, were one of the most critical ways in which these most fractured communities are resisting their own erasure, and laying claim to space, self, and community once more. Often quite literally embodying and performing through their bodies and voice within and against these violences through renewed rituals of movement and song. At times splintering, even if momentarily, the various regimes of power that have rendered them uncounted and inaudible. Ritual and body are broken, still bodies congregate and appear and demand to be counted, to be seen. Uncounted bodies counter their own erasure, appearing on the street, on a link, on a feed, performing and activating a collective body and reclaiming their right to spaces, in a way that entangles material bodily presence and virtual afterlives.

May amnesia repositions the figures and collected material as a quasi-actual, quasi-virtual actors of their lives and times. Casting these figures as characters in an unusual script that thinks through the relationship between violence, performativity, the body, virtuality, and future time. The work delves into the complexities of never-ending records of the everyday, amidst the amnesia and erasure that marks our time. Inviting us to consider the forms of entanglements between the destruction of bodies and the erasure of images. And the conditions under which these same bodies and images might once again reappear, both materially and digitally/virtually."

So circling back to this, to the postscript of this project, and how we arrived to this sort of toggling between, like, a disembodiment and embodiment, you know, mutating between a sort of virtual and physical presence, and the mutation of things when they move between the virtual space and the physical space.

When all these elements arrived in the postscript, you know, during that pandemic, we felt that these element, which Ruanne will unpack more shortly, should also be performed by us as a set of avatars. So embodying the tensions, disjunctions, and potential between material presence and immaterial virtuality. So the avatars sort of make a reappearance, and i think Ruanne, once Ruanne unpacks it it will be more obvious where they came from.

Abou-Rahme: [UNCLEAR]

Abbas: Yeah, yeah, okay. Ah, so, yeah yeah yeah. Oh yeah.

Abou-Rahme: Sorry, we're sharing one script.

And just to say that these images are from part two of the web platform, which, you know, includes the archive, and it includes the performances that we made in conversation with this archive, and there's also an index of about 170 videos, about seventy of which that have been transcribed and translated. So, you know, all of this material still exists online, and then the, the exhibition happened after the online project was launched, and essentially, it's a four-channel video and sound installation, so I'll speak a little bit more about the actual, the, the part, it's like really connected to the exhibition.

So the starting point for this project are communities under threat, and living fabrics that are disappearing, and people who have been forcefully displaced are deemed illegal, and it's a situation of violent and intense precarity, where rituals of song, dance, become really invaluable testimonies that exist in the threshold between material and virtual time and space. And so the project really originates in the intersections and contaminations between physical, digital, and virtual space. And we collected most of these videos at a distance, most of the places we could never reach, so the videos are really from Iraq, Palestine, and Syria, and most of the people not being able to reach us. But the virtual afterlives of this material is just as equally marked by precarity, instability, and disappearance as their material counterpart. There's a lot of censorship and surveillance. And in the collection of the online material and the performances that we created, there's a claim to not just self but critically to space, so we, you know, worked with four performers, three of whom are electronic musicians, and one who is a dancer, but we worked with them really just to use their bodies and their voices. So it was very much coming out of their usual sort of space of comfort, and very much thinking about the body and the voice as a sampler that is speaking to the archive. And what we really did to create the performances was very much linger in certain fragments, so, a collection of words, a refrain, a certain melody, or rhythm, and to really sort of improvise within that. And in that way, the individual performances that we created with the musicians and dancer really speak to and articulate a spectral absent collective.

There is this sense that in every gesture, or tone, or word, or rhythm, there is this prior inscribed, right? Because this material has come to us from all these different places, and many times some of these songs would be, you know, performed in Syria, and then re-performed in Iraq, and then arrive to Palestine, and every time they would shift and change, and by the time we were creating performances from them, they were also mutating and shifting. And yet there was always the voices of others embedded within them. So there is this sense, for us, that we were thinking about, of it being your voice, and also the voice of others having sort of shapeshifted so many times, to reach us in the there and then and here and now. And in that way, we're constantly trying to move towards this, like, multiplicity in the utterance. And to really think about this idea that Stefania Pandolfo speaks about, where the song itself starts to testify to, you know, it's not the representation,

but the song becomes the representative. And, you know, that's something we were thinking a lot about, well, what is our testimony of our time? Are they being written, or are they being sung in these videos that are then circulated online?

So, you know, so much of the project is thinking about sonic language, and the way in which people resist through sound, and through body, essentially through the last things that they have. But it also very much thinks about sonic inscriptions in the land itself, what remains as, like, an echo or a resonance in the land. The performances that we made with the performers, we generally did them outside, in places that are very much under threat of being taken. (00:40:07) And it was very much about being in that space together. And really feeling the kind of vibrational sort of echoes of that, of the space, and of all these nonhuman sort of like forces in, in the, in the land. And a lot of very crazy things happened while we were filming. All these things came into the performances, essentially. {clears throat} This is another component that we kind of developed that is, really focused also on the thistles and thorns that we were encountering and are a big part of the work.

And then, the last thing that I'd like to talk about it, you know, during the exhibition we basically commissioned artists, SCRAAATCH were one of the artists that we commissioned, it was amazing, to really engage in the project in any way that they wanted. It could either be the material, from the archive, or it could just be conceptually, to create a new performance. And it's very much, for us, about opening up the project to further inscriptions and, and voices, and so we had, during the show, a month of performances by SCRAAATCH, and Hiro Kones, and Muqata'a. We did a performance, and all the, also we had a jam session that was very, which SCRAATCH was with us for, very nerve-wracking but also kind of exciting, in the end. And it was just a way for us to keep also the space active, and live, and to also try and build a community around the work. And I think we'll play the, an extract? It's outside of the, cause it's a really big – it's a four-channel work, so it's kind of hard to not see that way, so we're gonna play a video. It's here, in the Quicktime. But it's gonna be quite small, and I'm sorry for that.

Abbas: Yeah, it's like three screens, but we sort of put them together. [video plays 00:42:28 – 00:45:43] [murmuring about resetting screen]

So, there's not, like, much time, but I'm gonna attempt to talk about one more work, which is an older work. Here we're like thinking of breath as land. I'll read a little bit of an extract from the text from the work, just to kind of give an idea maybe of a little bit of the vibe, and then if we have time, I'll play a video as well.

"I looked out at Kufer Birim through the strange circular eyes, and all I could think was, if this was meant as a spirit mask for the dead when it was made, was it a spirit mask, what is it a spirit mask for now? For the dead, or for the living? I was surrounded by bushes, plants and trees that were all shades of phosphoric green. I don't know if it was the effect of the heat or the mask, but I felt like the whole place was alive, swarming with life. I just had to use the mask to look out from under its eyes, to become it and let it become me. And then I could step out of time. Out of time. They invented this time that is occupied, this

time where they have declared me dead or dying. I am alive, this destroyed village is alive, this mask is for the living.”

So this work was called *And yet my mask is powerful*, and the initial impulse of the work was, once again, an extreme violent situation. It was basically towards, there was some, there was Arab revolution that kicked off in Tunis and Egypt, in, around 2012. With uprisings happening across cities, and for the longest time, we were, you know, the revolutions are seen as a sort of failure, and for the longest time, we wanted to refuse to see them as failures. Because so much of what a failure is is calling it a failure, right? So if you refuse to call it that, then maybe we didn’t fail, maybe it’s, maybe it’s an impulse that will return, and keep coming back. But we had arrived to such a violent counter, counter-revolutionary moment, that essentially we didn’t know how to speak about such violence. We couldn’t face the violence. We kept looking away from it. And this was a violence, not just enacted on us physically, but it was also enacted on our imaginary. It was a violence and a sense of futurity, you know. And I’m really talking here about the violent movements like ISIS and al Qaeda that were coming out, and were sort of spreading these, like, very violent videos. So we were refusing to engage with them, but also we didn’t know how to speak about them.

And then we came across a poem by Adrienne Rich, who’s an American poet, a poem from the ‘70s called “Diving Into The Wreck,” and in this poem, Adrienne is essentially diving into a shipwreck, into the sea, in a body of water, and in the poem, Adrienne is engaging with the materiality of the wreck, and the very visceral bodily experience of returning to a site of wreckage. So the wreck becomes not only a witness of its own erasure, but it also, it resists its own erasure.

Another thing that came out of the poem was the mask. So in the, in the, in the poem, Adrienne Rich wears a scuba diving mask, to allow her to breath underwater. (00:50:01) So this mask is giving her power, and allowing her to be where she should not be. And, for us, we, the way we work, is we allow things to enter the work, and all these possibilities start coming out, so we don’t have a fixed thing. All of this is what the work is about. So, when we think about masks in Palestine, you immediately think of ski masks that the youth wear when they’re confronting the army or the settlers. And so, you know, we went into Google, and put Palestine masks, and yes, as expected, most of the images were of ski masks. But we also came across this really interesting old mask, and basically the Israel Museum, in Jerusalem, was holding an exhibition of twelve masks, which were the oldest known masks in history. And what was really interesting for us was the way that these masks were being narrated, by the museum, but also by the media around this. So, you know, these masks were three thousand – how many? Nine thousand years old masks. So they don’t just pre-date Israel and Palestine, but they pre-date all of the religions that we know of today. And so, it was quite something to see the museum narrate this as part of, like, some state mythology, you know, that was, you know, the ancient land of this and that. And, so, in a way, we thought, we started to go about thinking how we could, or maybe to think about our practice as a sort of counter-mythology to the sort of dominant narratives that exist. And so we set about thinking about how we could then intervene.

We worked with a designer, they had one of those walkthrough exhibition things, where you could kind of walk through the exhibition, and we went and took screenshots from all of the sides, and we recreated the mask. We started to 3D print in different colors, and different materials. And then, what happened as a result was we also wrote a text about the work, so, the narrative for us in the text is that young Palestinians have hacked these masks from the museum, and they're now printing them in different colors, and they're going to the sites of their destroyed villages, and they're creating new rituals. That's the text of the work. And it's like presented as a, as something that is happening. You know, it's not presented as a myth, or as a thing, but it's something that is happening. And so, now when you search for Palestine masks on Google, you get our masks as well. You get their masks, and you get our masks. And so in a way, and every time we show the work, the Google algorithm sort of changes. Our masks start to appear in the, more and more. So it was a kind of way of us creating this counter-mythology. And in the end, they, they, they deleted the walkthrough exhibition from their site. Now, we don't know if it's from us, but we like to think it is. I mean, it's a --

Another very important element in this work was, you know, this work is trying to think about, you know, the site of the wreck, and the potential of the site of the wreck. And at the heart of, when it comes to Palestine, at the heart of the wreckage is more than 500 destroyed villages that are in what is now present day Israel. So not the West Bank and Gaza, but inside what is known today as Israel, there are more than 500 destroyed villages that were ethnically cleansed and emptied. So, we began taking trips to those villages, discovering those villages. Taking the masks and taking people who'd never been to those villages, that were, but would like to go. And we didn't really set out to sort of document the destruction in the villages, but we set out to sort of try to capture that visceral experience of going to the village, because, essentially, something really, something, so, the thing is that these destroyed villages also, there was already a movement of young people going back to these villages. And what was very interesting for us about these trips was that they weren't these, like, nostalgic trips. And, you know, when you take a trip to these villages, it's not like you're going to a past that you knew, because you weren't alive then. And it's not a future that you can even imagine, because it's a totally destroyed place. And the colonization is so total that, you know, you can't really imagine another, a different way. But what does happen is that you feel like you almost dropped out of time. Because you're really not in the present or in the past. You're in this, like, virtual time, almost. You're dropping out of time when you go to these villages. And so, that's really what we sought, like, tried to do, was to capture this visceral experience of essentially almost dropping out of time. And even if momentarily, that dropping out of time was essentially defying colonial time.

So, the villages then become a site not just of ruin, but a space where you can start to think about the incomplete nature of the colonial project. Another very important aspect was the vegetation. So, the vegetation in these villages was many times the way we would find the village. Because a lot of the old villages would marquee their village with things like cactus. And cactus is very hard to kill. So even though the settlers, after they destroyed the villages, they would plant eucalyptus to hide the remains of the village, because eucalyptus actually eats all the nutrients around it, and they would also plant pine trees that they brought from Switzerland, to sort of make it look like Europe. And every year,

these trees go, burn, like til now, every year now we had these fire that happened. And it's sort of like the nature resisting. Also nature, like, resisting colonization.

And of course when we went to the villages, we saw all this life there, because, from these plants. So this space was meant to be this dead space, was all of a sudden really alive, and full of plants, and full of, and they come back every spring, and they, so, they're kind of resisting as well. And so we started, they became like a character in the work, so all these plants were being brought back from specific villages, and we created a, almost a sort of archive of what plants are around which villages. We even implicate collectors. Whenever a collector buys a work, then they have to, like, fund trips, every couple of years, to bring Palestinians to these villages, to collect and repel – you know, cause they're worried the plants will go off. And so, our, we're like, well, you know, you can always fund trips, and we can bring you more plants every couple of years, something like that. So the institutions is almost like implicated in this lie, you know, political, like, gesture that – do we have time to play the?

Abou-Rahme: No, we don't.

Abbas: Ok, so we'll just stop there.

Abou-Rahme: They could see the video online.

Abbas: The video, there's an extract online of the video, and, yeah, if anyone wants to see any of the videos, you can just get in touch, and we'll send you links, and stuff.

Abou-Rahme: Yeah.

Abbas: Thank you.

Abou-Rahme: Thank you. {applause, cheering}

Abbas: Yeah, and we'll take questions, I guess.

Audience #1: Hi. Just wait a second – oh, wow. Thank you so much. I just wanted to ask about the staggering of the screens. And I think, like, seeing them in the presentation and seeing them in person, it made me think so much about this kind of, like, subjective point of view and like what that does to the viewer in terms of like, yeah, how you're thinking about perspective and fracture. And I just wanted to hear a bit more about that construction, it seems so repeated, as well, in the way that we see your work.

Abou-Rahme: Yeah, I think there's – should I start?

Abbas: Yeah! Start now.

Abou-Rahme: I think there's, that sort of layering, or fracturing, comes up in so many different ways, in our practice. It comes up physically in space, in terms of how we're

treating the projection, but it also comes up in the way that we're working with, like, 2D images. And I think that there's a lot of things happening there; there's, one is really like, for us, it was like a question of the way in which, you know, things are taken as like a singular event, and then trying to fight against that singularity, and really thinking about the present as like a, as like a density of all these times that are lived all together, and what happens when you unfold and then refold things, in like, one space. So it's very much about, you know, thinking about time differently, thinking about how we think about, like, resonance or accumulation. And, and it's also about the inability to ever really fully see, right? So I think there's so many ways that we're thinking about that. (01:00:15) Because that's what fracturing does, right? Fracturing breaks the whole, and becomes more and more fragmented.

But it's also, you can think about it as sort of being something that counters the project of modernity, which is always about this, like, seamless, homogenized progression of space and time. So it's like, how do you turn something that has been turned against you against power itself? And then kind of opens it up to, to kind of multiplicity in, in the way that you see, in the way that the image is broken, and in the way that the image can never be fully captured, and then you can't really capture, you can't fully capture the material, which is always a question for us, in terms of like, the gaze, and who's looking at our work, and these institutions, and the politics of that. So how do you bring all of these things into it? One, which is like resisting this idea of a kind of flat narrative or time, and opening up the multiplicity, and, you know, thinking about what fragmentation does, but also then using that to empower yourselves. It's all these different things that then get expressed in different ways.

And then also, I think it's, you know, for us, thinking about sound and image as like, body, inside space, you know, so creating something that feels bodily, almost. Yeah.

Audience #2: Oh, shoot, that's loud. One of the biggest things that I was noticing about your interpretation of time and space and bodies was, like, there's this opposition between the constructed time and then the time that is created within the artifice of the archive. I'm thinking of you as almost studying, like, interpretation or hermeneutics when you, like, approach the language of images, and how you put a user, and then you put the viewer, in the same place.

Abou-Rahme: Yeah.

Audience #2: Like, that was one of the biggest things that I noticed between the interfaces that you were explicitly showing, and then creating in that space that you were inhabiting, and I was wondering, like as an aspect of language, cause I see images in your work as like a language, is, is there something ever, like, lost in translation, because human beings operate very differently on time than, like, archives do. We don't operate in an archive. We don't see things like images on a screen. But we interpret that as a tool to use for our daily lives, and so we are subject to kind of filtering a lot of that down, because our senses just can't take in all of that information. As you were saying just a second ago.

So I was wondering, how do you feel about injecting that kind of media discourse and then kind of, with that spatial discourse, and kind of it pushing back and forth with your work? Especially in every iteration.

Abou-Rahme: Yeah.

Abbas: Yeah. There's a lot to think about there. Yeah, I mean I think that, you know, the way that we developed our spatial language, yeah, I think it comes a lot from trying to keep this, so, you know, I think that the body and the sort of physical experience in a space became a really important thing to us. When we, so we sort of thought about it in a, in Palestine, when you're essentially, like, one of the ways that you have to, like, survive, is basically to almost separate your mind from your body, at many moments. So, like, there's something like, essentially, that defies, like, logic, for the brain, and for the body. And so, in order for you to survive, let's say you want to cross the checkpoint, and the checkpoint is a very sort of violent process, but really, really, when you cross the checkpoint, you have to separate your mind from your body, and you have to give that body up to this machine, in order for you to make it to the other side, in, like, one piece. And it becomes like a practice. You don't even know you're doing it, you just do it, because you need to get to work, or you need to get to university, or whatever it is.

And so the site, the body became like a really important site for us to think about the senses, you know, the sound and video. And how that translated formally in a space was, you know, to sort of, you know, you're either in the work, or you're out of the work. And it's, sometimes you, you know, when you're inside, you don't feel good. You feel agitated. You feel, you know, all kinds of feelings. But there isn't that sort of separation between you and the art object. You know, there's an object hanging on the wall, and you're looking at it. So we wanted to really diminish that space. We want it to make, to implicate the body in the work whenever we could. I have no idea if that answers your question, but that's my --

Abou-Rahme: Well, there's, that's, like, cause we can talk about that in so many ways.

Abbas: Yeah.

Abou-Rahme: Also in terms of, like, the online platform, and how we are both, like, using the language of the internet, also trying to push up against it sometimes, and slow things down, or unravel on this, like, unfolding. But all the time, of course, there's the, you know, sort of like excess that's there that we're working with, so it's, there's just like so much that could be said about that.

Abbas: I think we also insist on the excess. Like, we insist on opening it up to as many readings and possibilities as possible.

Abou-Rahme: Yeah.

Abbas: So, we have no fear in like, things getting lost in translation, because --

Abou-Rahme: Oh actually, that's part of it, yeah. That's an important part of our work, yeah.

Abbas: Exactly. It's a very important part of our work, that we want it to be interpreted in many different ways. In fact, we see our work more as a call, that people can take up. And actually, before the latest work, most of our works were, you never saw someone's face, you always had a character turned, you could always see them from behind, so it's as if the character is bearing witness to what is happening, but also you, but also it's a call for the viewer to take up that position. So, yeah, that sort of lost in translation is like a, part of the work. Like, we want it. We don't call it lost in translation, we just call it, like, opening it up to other interpretations, and other experiences.

Abou-Rahme: Right.

Abbas: Yeah.

Audience #3: Given the, the fact that the archive of this talk will only be available to Skowhegan residents, and you guys have, like, the, I think the ability in that moment to sort of say maybe what you don't normally say at a talk, I'm very curious what you'd like to say that's not on a public record. {laughter}

Abou-Rahme: What would you like to say that's not on public record?

Abbas: Mm. Probably something about the art world. {Abou-Rahme laughs}

Abou-Rahme: What would I like to say that's, you know – I mean, I don't know. I mean, I'm exhausted, that's something I'd like to say.

Abbas: Yeah.

Abou-Rahme: I'm really exhausted. You know, thinking about how ta, like how taxing it is to be in a certain moment in your career and practice, and the way that the art world is very extractive, which is something that we think about in relation to our projects, but we don't always, you know, as artists think about, and in relation to ourselves, because a lot is being extracted from us, and, and demanded of us to perform in a certain way, so the extraction is really exhausting after a while. So that would be my thing to say, out, you know, that I don't usually say.

Abbas: Yeah, or I would say, like, I wish I, like, paced myself out a little more. That's also something I would say. You know. And resist this like pressure to produce, pressure to show, pressure to join a gallery, pressure to – don't join galleries. {laughter} That's something I would say. Like, if you can, don't. Don't give 'em fifty percent.

Abou-Rahme: Yeah, as well as that, yeah.

Abbas: So, yeah, I mean, I don't know. It's, it's {laughing} a really good question. I wish, actually, we had more of that, to be honest. You know, like I wish we had less recorded stuff, less streamed stuff, and more, like, open discussions about what really is happening, like, day-to-day, as artists, how we can share information to help each other out, because nobody tells you this stuff, you know? You just have to take it, and learn it, and then you're like, well, why didn't that artist ever tell me? They're much older than, you know, {laughter} they've been doing this for twenty years {laughter}, why didn't they tell me that this would happen, you know? And that's because we are, like, we're made to feel that, you know, we're special, you know, and so we shouldn't really share that information, because you're gonna mess it up for the galleries, or you're gonna mess it up for the institutions, and the biennials, and, you know, if you tell the young artists how to do it, then, you know, and other than like, otherwise they have to wait fifteen years to, like, you know, learn the stuff, and, like, that is like general knowledge for artists. (01:10:40) And, yeah, I wish that we had more of that, that we could talk frankly and like give each other real advice as to like, you know --

Abou-Rahme: Publicly, you mean, because we talk privately.

Abbas: Yeah, publicly. We do all the time, but I wish we could do that more publicly, and really put it out there, you know. Yeah. And we had to learn all that on our own, you know, and go through the hardships, and go through things, so, yeah.

Audience #4: Hi. I was curious to hear – I'm in the back.

Abou-Rahme: Hi.

Audience #4: Hi. I was curious to hear more about what you've learned in collaborating with one another, just aspects that have been working well in the collaborative process, and what aspects are more challenging.

Abou-Rahme: Yeah, I mean, I think the, the creative work has been great, the creative part {laughs} because I think we were both really trying to find a different language, and it was only in the meeting of each other that we were able to come to that language together. So that's been very exciting, because it took us to places that I don't know if we would have ended up in by ourselves, if there hadn't been that synthesis? And also we worked really hard to transfer skills and knowledge to one another, and, so, you know, not, not have sort of very demarcated, like, oh, you do this, I do that. But we really shared the skills and the knowledge.

The difficult parts are like the administration of it all. {laughs} There's a lot of administrative work that goes into making shows, and performances, and we have very different temperaments with that. {laughter} You know, so, there's, you know, we hardly ever have – I mean, there are times when we're like first starting a project that, you know, our projects really start through conversation, and like, lots of conversation, and we both have to feel convinced of an idea to pursue it. So, they're not disagreements, then, but we can like challenge each other and say, oh, okay, I'm not really sure that's anything yet.

That's very enriching, and, and great. But then there are times when we're clashing just over, like, what our timetable should be, what should happen when, you know, so all that sort of administrative work is really not easy with another person, I have to say. {laughing} Right? That's the biggest challenge. But otherwise we love also working with other people.

Abbas: Yeah.

Abou-Rahme: And just, you know – but the whole technical side is a little, yeah. I'm very last minute, he's very pre-prepared {laughter} so it's like, aaagghhh. {laughter} Right? So, yeah.

Abbas: Yeah, I think also, creatively, it can, so, it can be very enriching, but also it can be frustrating in terms of, like, so, you know, you get stuck sometimes, if, you know, if one of us is like just not convinced of this thing, and we're in the middle of creating. It doesn't happen often, but it does happen. And then you're kind of stuck. You're kind of, like, can't really move and proceed, because we're not in agreement about how to move. And I feel that it's a kind of double-edged sword, so when that happens, things are moving slower, and you're like, oh, if I was just an artist by myself, I would just decide, I would just make an executive decision, and we'd just move on right now.

But then I feel that when things are moving, they probably move, they're much smoother, because you have, like, two people. So you have like a reassurance, almost. So all that doubt that you have is kind of, sometimes, easier when you're with someone, cause that person can be like, oh yeah, you're right, or not, you're not, and like, you know, yeah. So.

Audience #5: Hey. I'm, I'm so stimulated by so many things you've said. But I was thinking about this idea of lingering in the break, and the line break, and some of the texts that I'm seeing, and repetition and poetics, and how that's functioning in terms of like breakage or counter-narrative, specifically.

Abou-Rahme: Mmhmm.

Audience #5: And I was wondering if you were interested in talking about the writing process. You said you sample --

Abou-Rahme: Yeah.

Audience #5: -- but also just how that works.

Abou-Rahme: Yeah, well, I mean, part of my practice is also that I, I don't know, I'm a poet that has never published any of my poetry {laughs} and poetry has been a big part of my, my life personally, and my, my own, like, history. And then, you know, when we started working together, the poetics really entered our work. I mean, in the beginning it was mostly things that we were sampling from other writers, and then, you know, rescripting, and we would have just like an online document that we would keep on going back and

forth on. And in a way, you know, what poetry does is that it, it breaks language, right? And recreates it. It's all about those breaks, right? And pulling the language apart, to piece it together, sometimes still incoherently. And that can be, probably be evocative and powerful. So that, the way that, that poetry actually thinks about language. It was very influential for us in terms of how we think about our projects, and how we compose different elements of our projects that are not related to text.

And then most recently, for our most recent work, you know, we wrote about ninety-five percent of that text during the, during the pan – like, we started it right before the pandemic, and then it just continued and became this very long script. So, so in a way, we also think about it as a script, because, you know, we usually start with text, and then everything is sort of created in relation to that text, so that, so the text is really the anchor for the work, so even like the sound is its own, you know, conceptual interpretation of the text. It's not made to the image. It's made in relation to the text, and then image comes with it, and then they interact. So that's why we really see them as, like, video and sound works. Cause the sound is, you know, created as its own thing.

Abbas: Yeah, we create --

Abou-Rahme: Is there anything you want to add?

Abbas: -- the sound even before, before film, like, before we go to film, we create some of, a lot of the sounds, because they inform a lot of things, like color, and rhythm, and movement. It's obviously not final in any way, it's just these kind of – and we also work, so when we first started working together, actually, we were working in a live setting. I used to DJ for a hip-hop group, a very popular hip-hop group, that, they don't exist anymore, in Palestine, but they were touring. And I managed to convince Ruanne to do some live visuals, like VJing, during, and it was very difficult because it was, like, hip-hop, it wasn't like even, you know, it was straight hip-hop. But I feel – why did I say this?

Abou-Rahme: Probably talking about live elements.

Abbas: Yeah, so {laughs} –

Abou-Rahme: And improvisation.

Abbas: -- basically, {laughter} even when we, even when we're working in the studio, we actually work live. So we record, we jam. You know, the desktop is also like a way we kinda jam. We bring text, and image, and open up a thing, and then we take a screenshot. Boom, that's like, but it's like live, it's sort of this like improv thing that we're doing. And that's because we started off in that way, so we kinda tried to keep that way of composing. So, actually, before we even edit sometimes, or even go to film, we do this, like, long jam that we record of like, live video. We have this software called Resolume, which is like a live video software. And I have Ableton Live, which is like a audio live software, and we just record hours and hours of us doing stuff. And then, from that, we can take fragments and

things and look at them, and say, oh that worked, that worked really well, that works really nice, and then it forms so many things that way, you know, so, yeah. (01:19:57)

Audience #6: I was gonna ask how you met, but I guess you answered that. I'm also curious, do you both have separate practices that you're ongoing, working on, and how do those separate practices inform the collaboration?

Abou-Rahme: Mmhmm. Well, we don't --

Abbas: We actually don't have separate practices.

Abou-Rahme: Kinda got subsumed.

Abbas: We got, yeah. {laughter}

Abou-Rahme: I mean

Abbas: We never, so, we never really decided to be a duo, to be honest, so we never said, oh, you know, let's be a duo, and, like, we started making work. We basically got invited, once, to do this thing together, and it just kept happening. And then we were like, oh, I guess we're a duo, oh, I guess we don't have time to do anything else.

Audience #6: I was gonna ask about time.

Abou-Rahme: But I mean, Basel has been, you know, you've gone back, since the pandemic, and he's, you're making music.

Abbas: Well, yeah, so part of the --

Abou-Rahme: [UNCLEAR]

Abbas: -- part of the work that we've done if, when, the ones that we showed that was at the MOMA, which has performers, and musicians. So, when we sort of collaborate, we also kind of enter the people's lives that we're collaborating with. Like, we don't, it's not just about us and our work, and this is obviously our project, and we pay them a, obviously as much money as we can, and we take care of them, and all of that. But also, we work on their stuff. So, I'm like, now, embroiled with like five or six emcees that I produce for. And that I mix their stuff, and Ruanne sometimes makes covers for, so we kinda work on their stuff, as well. So I, through that, started to make music again, essentially. So I've been, for the last couple of years, like, you know, like, not just sound stuff for our work, but actual tracks, which has been difficult, cause it's very different. There's a structure, and, you know, all of these guys, they want to come, they want to listen, they're like, nah, nah, you know, like okay, you know, like, okay, I'm starting to get a little insulted, fine, you know, like {laughter} and then they hear something, they're like, yeah, yeah, press record, okay, I'm like, okay. Then I sit there for like hours all night, just recording this -- you know, like, so, yeah, that's

really a lot of fun, actually. But I hope it doesn't get serious, to be honest. {laughter} Like I hope it stays in this, like, nonserious, like, thing, so that I can stay liking it, I guess.

Abou-Rahme: Yeah, we also, like, started, like, an interdisciplinary, like, publishing platform, that basically is about, you know, how we can redistribute resources that we get, as artists, or like, young writers and artists and musicians, I mean, starting in Palestine, but it will spread out. So we, you know, it's like micro-commissions for visual artists, and we've released two albums now. We're, you know, doing an exhibition in London, that was an invitation for us that we sort of like transformed into an invitation for younger artists, that really need that support. So a lot of your work is also not our work, you know, it's, it's thinking about, you know, I think as artists we need to think about how to redistribute resources that we get access to, you know?

Abbas: And knowledge.

Abou-Rahme: Once we have them. We don't always have the resources, but once we do, what can you do, you know? I mean, it was hard for us, starting out, so that's something that's always on our mind.

Abbas: We also do a lot of anonymous work. Like, pamphlets, and posters, in Palestine. Exclusively in Palestine, because that's like our space and that's, you know, where we feel we can do this. We understand the community, we understand the society. And we don't actually exhibit much in Palestine. Partially because of, I mean, it's elitist, like everywhere else, but in Palestine it takes on a much more, like, elitist, like, form. And so it's not, it's not easy to engage the public. So you have to find other ways. So, people there are really into music, and concerts. So they go to that. But like through visual arts, the way we found was like through anonymous work. And rightly so. Palestinians are suspicious of artists, {laughs} right? And they have every right to be, to be honest. If you look at what artists have done there, and how the cause gets used and utilized, and, not just by artists from there, but artists from all over the world, go to Palestine and take photos and stuff. So they're very suspicious of art and artists and institutions. And so, there was a lot of power in anonymous work, where they couldn't find who the artist was. There was no name, of anyone, and so, people feel like it's theirs. And so they distributed. And we've had, like, crazy things, like a publication of ours get given out in like public schools and villages. You know, like, the whole school in the village has this, like, these books, you know? And someone took them from the city to the village and distributed them. We have no idea who. So that's like, very exciting for us, and that's something we would try to hold onto. It becomes much more difficult, obviously, when you travel so much, and we live between New York and Palestine, so it's much more difficult, but it's something that we – and it's not something that anyone gives you money to do, obviously. So, you have to, like, fund it yourself, you have to organize it yourself and do it, but we're very committed to that. Yeah.

Audience #7: I'm really intrigued by this idea of resisting colonial time. And I want to ask if you can speak a little bit more about the strategies you embed in your work that you use to resist colonial time.

Abou-Rahme: Yeah, I mean, I think that, you know, one of the things that colonial time does is that it, it, it fossilizes things, right? So it puts material, living culture into, like, a fossilized state of dead time, and that's how you end up with looted culture, right? You end up with things in museums that were never objects, really to be looked at, but were part of a living fabric, or part of a material culture, or part of ritualistic practice, and were really part of living time. So, I, I feel that a lot of what we think about, you know, is how can we get back to that living time, right? How can we resist the way in which colonial time fossilizes and sterilizes and historicizes everything, right?

So like, you know, with the destroyed villages, when we were making the project, they were turning – cause there was a battle with people who were from those villages wanting to go back, and the Israeli Antiquities Authority was turning three, thirty-six of those sites into, like, a renovated space, in which everything would be renovated, but you couldn't use any of the spaces anymore. And so --

Abbas: So they would renovate them, but you can only look at them, you can't use them.

Abou-Rahme: Right, so it becomes like a museum rather than a space that you could use, and activate, and become a space together in, and become a --

Abbas: You're talking about a whole village, so.

Abou-Rahme: -- become a space from which you can resist. So I think it's, you know, that's one of the ways that we try to, you know, sort of keep that idea of living time very much active. And then, another way that we think, try to think about it is, you know, how to, how to not always start within that kind of colonial sort of language or frame, right? Cause it also, part of what colonial time does is that it, it sort of closes off your imaginary, right? It closes off your sense of futurity that can be beyond, whether it's colonial or capitalism, all these things come together, right? This whole system, you know, is very much about capturing you, and capturing the imaginary in a way that it becomes, you know, sort of impossible to imagine something else, so we, we think a lot about virtuality, you know, if we can't imagine an immediate future, then kind of virtuality is that space because what is and what could be, and how can we keep that space of what could be alive somehow? So, yeah.

Audience #8: Hi.

Abou-Rahme: Hi.

Audience #8: Thank you so much. I was thinking about how, throughout your lecture, about how plants are experiencing our time.

Abou-Rahme: Mmhmm.

Audience #8: And I was thinking about maybe in their, like, residency, like with the cactus, or how the pine tree, or eucalyptus, which is native somewhere is weaponized in another place.

Abou-Rahme: Yeah.

Audience #8: And the seeds in the dark slides of your older work. And I wanted to learn more about what your relationship to plants has been, maybe throughout your life, and then also maybe particularly in how you are having a public interact with your work.

Abou-Rahme: Yeah. Do you want to start?

Abbas: I can start, if you don't feel like it.

Abou-Rahme: No, I'll do it. So, I feel like the, the relationship to the land, in general, has been, you know, a very big part of my life, and you know, the desire for the land that can never be, you can never fully inhabit in the way that you want to inhabit freely, and without fear, is, and your ability to move through the land, you know, when the situation in Palestine is that you come up against, like, a literal, like, end to the space that you're, an artificial end to the space that you're allowed to be in. (01:30:27) So, the relationship to land is a very complex thing. You know, full of sort of longing and desire, but also pain and sort of like violence that you see happening to the land, and to the landscape itself, and in a way, when we worked on *A mask is powerful*, you know, going back to this, destroyed villages, in the springtime, and seeing, you know, the extent to which the sites were so alive, with all of these, like, non-human sort of beings was incredibly, you know, powerful, for us. I mean, I guess it was something that we always felt, this connection to the land, and the way that the land itself resists, but I think on those trips, because you enter the site, and really like, trip sometimes, like it was, a, finding the site, we find it through the vegetation, and you know, sometimes it would be like, a whole path of, like, wild fennel and, you know, follow the wild fennel, and get to the ruins of the village, so it was very much almost like the plants were speaking to us, and we were having a conversation. And the more than we went to the sites, the more that we knew which vegetation to follow, and would lead us. So it was a very intimate experience, and, and, and, like a very powerful one that was unexpected, and that's when we tried to think about how the vegetation constitutes this, like, living archive of the space, that's also resisting the erasure. So, and, you know, since then it's been a very big aspect of our work. The thistles come back in most of our videos, because they're, you know, thorns grow where the soil has been disturbed, and, you know, they're a very beautiful plant that's also very, very prickly, at the same time. And, you know, it was a way for us to think about the whole condition of, of sort of being unwanted, being illegal, yet being extremely resilient. And powerful, and beautiful at the same time. And these plants, the thorns, when they decay, they breathe new life into the soil, which allows some of the original vegetation that's there to return, so thistles are really interesting in that way.

So the plants become this, like, other character that I think, whether it's in the video or in the installations, with actual plants itself, you feel, you sense, very strongly, I think, yeah.

Abbas: I'll just add to that that basically, you know, also, colonialism, you know, there are certain plants that are illegal to forage in Palestine --

Abou-Rahme: Oh, yeah that's --

Abbas: -- and that's, you know, one of them is an edible thorn, thistle, that Palestinians have in their cuisine --

Abou-Rahme: Another thistle, a different one.

Abbas: It's not the purple one, it's a different one, it's called akoub, and it grows only, like, two three months a year, on the hilltops, like, high hilltops. And we, like, love that food, so we eat it only during that time, it's like a delicacy in Palestinian cuisine. And the Israelis made it illegal to forage. So you're not allowed to forage that plant, and apparently it's endangered. You know, they use it as like an environmental thing, but what they do is they sever your relationship to the land, you know? Because you can't then -- and then your cuisine gets lost, and, you know, all these things get lost. So there's a very strong constant --

Abou-Rahme: Struggle.

Abbas: -- constant struggle over the narrative of the land, but also access to the land, and the vegetation on the land. So it's a very real thing, as well, that, you know, is contested always, yeah.

Audience #9: Hey, y'all. I want to ask you about one of the points you made about the incomplete nature of colonial apartheid, and the tools with which the colonialization comes from this evolution of the concept of wholeness. In kind of grappling with having lived the experiences you've both lived, and coming from this position of being Palestinian people dealing with the very complicated and nightmarish conditions -- what has that evolution of wholeness kind of meant to you, and time? Is it still evolving?

Abou-Rahme: Mmhmm.

Audience #9: I'm just kind of very -- I really responded to that statement, and I was just wondering how you're feeling about it.

Abou-Rahme: I mean, for me, you know, I think all colonial projects are always incomplete, you know, that's why they're so violent, because the, the, you know, the need to erase, whether it's like, you know, whether we're talking about, like, physical erasure, or it's, you know, erasure of, like, material culture, or, is about the colonial project always trying to be complete and eradicate anything that could question it, right? So that --

Abbas: Reassure itself.

Abou-Rahme: -- that, you know, it's very important to keep in mind that it is incomplete, you know, because that becomes like a, a way in which we can, like, resist it. And then, you know, it was, I think that for such a long time, you know, there's been a lot of thinking about repair, or like, the politics of repair, and, you know sometimes I feel what's, what's missing is that, you know, sometimes you're in conditions and situations where there is an inability to make whole. There's an inability to repair, sometimes. You know, sometimes the thing is, remains broken. And then the sort of imperative that, you know, it needs to somehow be made whole, or be repaired, when there is the impossibility of that, becomes really kind of difficult.

So, for us, it was, you know, very much thinking about the conditions that we find ourselves in, where there feels like there is, like, this, this kind of impossibility with the current conditions for there to be this, like, I don't know if we ever want to make whole again anyway. Because all these breaks and ruptures, you enter this kind of state of mutability which is also very empowering, and resists a certain homogenization which I think is important. So it's really about how we can kind of sit with that, sit with the difficulties of that, but also then generate possibilities from that that allow for a different sense of, like, collectivity or like a way to emerge that's more about a constant state of becoming, or a multiplicity – also this kind of idea of multiplicity, of, you know, thinking about collectivity as something that doesn't, like, repress and like homogenize and try to make smooth. But rather allows for all the sort of, like, stutters, and breaks, and things that cannot, don't sit quite well, and yet we can sort of come into sort of collective space of becoming. So I think that's the way that we're trying to, like, think about it. It's always, like, how can you take the conditions that are meant to, like, kill you, and sort of like use them to essentially resist and to live.

Abbas: Yeah, I just want to add that I think pointing at the incomplete nature of colonialism is a sort of resistance, so it's sort of, like, points at it. It creates anxiety for the colonizer. When you're constantly pointing at their incomplete, the incomplete nature of their project. {laughter} And that creates a resistance, as well. It creates the, the space for resistance. So it's really al, like almost like you're creating anxiety for the colonizer. And as a result --

Abou-Rahme: Well, it's the haunting that we're talking about. {laughter}

Abbas: Yeah, it's the haunting, yeah, exactly, like --

Abou-Rahme: They're haunted.

Abbas: They're haunted. By us!

Abou-Rahme: Everywhere in the world.

Abbas: Everywhere. Not just in Palestine, everywhere in the world.

Abou-Rahme: Not just Palestine, it's here. They're haunted.

Abbas: It's here, it's everywhere.

Abou-Rahme: Yeah.

Abbas: And, you know, this incompleteness is why there's always violence. So, yeah. I think that's --

Abou-Rahme: Yeah. Might be a good place to end? Unless someone, like, has like a burning --

Abbas: Pressing question.

Abou-Rahme: -- question? No? {applause, cheering}