

WE ARE NOT
WORRIED
IN THE LEAST

نحن لسنا قلقين
على الإطلاق

J A S M I N A M E T W A L Y
E X H I B I T I O N 13.02.-11.03.2018

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S A V V Y CONTEMPORARY
THE LABORATORY OF FORM-IDEAS

 **68th Internationale
Filmfestspiele
Berlin**
Forum Expanded

 **arsenal**
institut für film und videokunst e.V.
archive außer sich

The project is presented within the context of and in collaboration with the 12th Forum Expanded | 68th Berlinale and *Archive Außer Sich*. *Archive außer sich*, a project of Arsenal - Institute for Film and Video Art in cooperation with Haus der Kulturen der Welt (HKW) as part of *The New Alphabet*, a HKW project supported by the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media due to a ruling of the German Bundestag.

CONCEPT

In 2016, S A V V Y Contemporary inaugurated a series of solo exhibitions by filmmakers that runs parallel to the Berlinale – starting with *Welcome to Applied Fiction* by Jean Pierre Bekolo, followed by *The Law of the Pursuer* by Amos Gitai. Film-makers are invited to work with the medium of the exhibition and present research materials from their archives: extra footage, objects, texts, notes collected in the process of film-making. For its third year, S A V V Y Contemporary has conceived a project with Egyptian-Polish filmmaker, artist and activist Jasmina Metwaly, who has been invited to work with the material she has been producing since 2011, in the aftermath of the Egyptian uprisings.

نحن لسنا قلقين على الإطلاق / *We are not worried in the least* is the outcome of this invitation. The historical background is the turbulent political and social landscape of Egypt in this timeframe: the uprisings of 2011 and the constitution of new civil formations (such as unions) and the strengthening of grassroots initiatives; a time of hope and imagination for new political groups, new disappointing elections, followed by a military coup that has repressed citizens' rights, forbidding public gatherings and protests in public spaces through the violent reinforcement of laws and the production of a continuous state of fear, effectively eliminating any opposition.

The title of the exhibition is a direct reference to the current permanent state of paranoia in the country, a political limbo that can only be described as a state of mundane and monotonous violence. Waiting in police stations or in courtrooms, on the phone for news from loved ones, the struggle has dramatically changed the lives of those involved. In the face of this existential and physical exhaustion, growing bored with or tired of it all may be the only way to overcome the current state of affairs. As the artist herself has pointed out, boredom comes as an effect that follows a period of dramatic and rapid (social, political, sexual,...) transformations. At the same time, boredom becomes a way to keep paranoia, anxiety and fear for your own life and/or the life of others at bay; boredom as a form of survival, of passive resistance. When the ability to affect changes through direct forms of action has been deeply compromised, boredom seems to become the only way out from the coercion, the social and political violence and repression systematically exercised by the Egyptian state.

Using different filmic languages, for this exhibition Metwaly has worked with materials from her previous projects, like for instance, footage filmed on the streets of Cairo between 2011 and 2013, during the artist's involvement in *Mosireen*, a non-profit media collective operating

at the intersection of citizen journalism and cultural activism in Egypt during the revolution, and which continued its activities throughout 2014 (and has recently made public its film archive on the website 858.ma). The material includes hours of raw footage from a four-day battle in Mohamed Mahmoud Street (2011), allowing us to experience the event in its real tempo. Thus, revealing how extended and uneventful a battle can be, but also posing questions concerning the role that a filmmaker plays as a participant in a political event. The exhibition also features many excerpts from films and ongoing projects realized in collaboration with Egyptian filmmaker and writer Philip Rizk, such as from *Out on the Street* (2015), an experimental film about a group of workers who have occupied the Starch & Glucose factory in Helwan (a suburb of greater Cairo). This story is told through the images produced with a mobile phone camera by Essam Aly Allam, a former worker there who filmed the occupation with the intention of using the images as evidence in a lawsuit against the factory's new owners. We will see also fragments from the lecture-performance *Exercises on Trials* (2016) – the first act of an ongoing research by Metwaly and Rizk on the repressive rule of law in Egypt. Here, we see the famous Tora courtroom, a microcosm of the Egyptian legal system; we witness the long and unnerving prior-to-trial reality, looking at the performativity of the gestures of legal actors, the silenced conversations between detainees and their representatives, and all those insignificant moments which are often kept outside the frame.

For her new film-installation, titled *6 Lessons with Alaa*, commissioned by S A V V Y Contemporary for the occasion, Metwaly has invited Egyptian performer Alaa Abdullatif to enact a series of para-educational lessons – lingering between poetry and parody – that teach us different potential methods to adopt when filming political events. Indeed, the exhibition itself shows how the reasons for filming and recording events and testimonies determine distances, shots and framing.

The choreography of these filmic materials, which the artist has edited and composed in new constellations for this solo-show, encourages a reflection on the different modes in which events are translated and fictionalized when captured by a camera, how experiences can be undone and retold through framing (understood as a way of drawing) and editing. In a historical moment in which political events get quickly spectacularized and distributed globally in the form of images, this exhibition speaks of the multiplicity of roles we play when we are producing as well as looking at them, and speculatively wonders what these pictures, now presented in Berlin, actually want.

INTERVIEW

(NOT) MAKING SENSE:
A CONVERSATION BETWEEN
JASMINA METWALY,
ANTONIA ALAMPI AND
PIA CHAKRAVERTI-WUERTHWEIN

This is a conversation that was held across many months and through different means: emails, Google drives and live discussions. It unpacks some of the complex knots that run through this exhibition and its many interpretative layers.

A . A . You started working as a filmmaker pretty much in conjunction with your move from Poland to Egypt, having been much more involved in painting before that. This relocation, not to mention the political environment at the time, seems to have been a major influence both on your artistic practice and on your role, or almost function, as an artist and human being. I remember doing a studio visit with you back in November 2011 in Cairo, and at the time you didn't even talk about the films you were shooting as materials for art and showed me instead a lot of (what I saw as) minimalist paintings. Could you tell us about that transition? And how much do you think your pictorial background has influenced your current work as a filmmaker?

J . M . The transition was gradual. I returned to Cairo sometime at the beginning of 2009. I arrived after having gone through an intense period working and living with other artists in a factory in Lubon (Poland). There, we collaboratively worked on a lengthy project *8784 h*. At that time I was more interested in the spatial and temporal aspects of video making, experimenting with very long, steady shots and recordings of different surroundings. This process of capturing time and space was closely connected to the paintings you saw back in Cairo. I never thought of them as minimalist; I was trying to capture the process of painting itself, the movement that defines it, focusing on the making. During 2011 (after the Arab uprisings that started in January of that year, ed.) curators from all over the world started visiting Cairo and its art scene very frequently. Politically driven practices emerged, both in terms of form and realization, but also content and narrative. It felt like a way of participating, of contributing to the political processes that the country was going through. I filmed. I was mostly documenting the ongoing struggles, such as violent clashes, particularly visible on the streets and in Tahrir Square. I collected testimonies, to be used both as materials for screenings and also to be shown during press conferences organized by various groups. I also stopped painting, and when you came to visit with your

group of international curators, I was caught off guard. I felt like I needed to play the role of an artist who pulls out her portfolio and chronologically walks you through her practice. I think that during that visit I had this, unconscious perhaps, urge to separate and even re-define my practice in Poland from my new one in Egypt.

P . C . W . In many cases your work as a documentary filmmaker with Mosireen served a sort of protective function: the presence of a camera could prevent police violence from escalating. Or, alternatively, you (or any other person with a camera) acted as a witness, building a narrative that informed the populace and challenged that of the state. A substantial amount of time has passed since you were on the streets. How has your relationship to your role as a filmmaker, and your understanding of the footage you took, changed?

J . M . Peter Watkins, the precursor of docudrama, asks his actors to look directly into the camera. Often filming from the perspective of a reporter, it is important for him that both the process and the experience of the onlooker come through. When people look into the camera, it's easy to believe that what they are saying is true, as if there was nothing to hide. I think that this has changed the way that TV reporters film, going from the so-called bird's-eye view, from above, into a grounded, one to one perspective. The way the revolution was documented was in the form of hundreds and hundreds of views recorded from the ground, rather than from an upper-hand perspective. When I first joined the protest I didn't know what I was doing. I took the camera with me because it felt natural, like a necessity, but I wasn't sure what was about to happen. Nobody was. The camera in this sense played a double role, that of an onlooker and equally that of a participant. It just wasn't clear to anybody back then what it was that was happening, but everyone was taking pictures with any means possible, while the spectacle of these images was still to be unleashed. What has changed since then is the political reality that surrounds us. I no longer film in the streets (since then protesting has become illegal, and filming outdoors can be seen as suspicious, ed.) but what is left of that period are the materials that were collected and my desire to fictionalize them. I'm interested in how films are made, what their texture is, and how they can fail to represent the events, the subjects, or the surroundings they aim to portray, and instead can offer a different and new kind of shared experience. I'm playing with different ways of documenting, for instance by experimenting with performance and re-enactment, with theater, with written texts, playing with video grabbing and other forms of image capturing.

P . C . W . A big part of this exhibition has to do with confronting the necessary boredom or withdrawal from the struggle in the face of an unchanging political climate. What has your experience been, now that you are re-encountering these images from a position of greater (physical, temporal, and emotional) distance?

J . M . Mosireen collective (a non-profit media collective born out of the explosion of citizen journalism and cultural activism in Egypt during the revolution that Metwaly co-founded, ed.) has recently launched an online media archive on <https://858.ma>. It comprises of over 858 hours of footage shot and collected in Egypt during the period of revolutionary upheaval that took place between 2011 and 2013. Some of this material is iconic, like the shots and violence of the confrontation between protesters and the police at Kasr El Nil bridge on the Friday of Anger (January 28, 2011) or the image of a boy getting shot in Alexandria (January 31, 2011). But the archive also contains a lot of moments that seemed irrelevant at the time: where nothing really happens, or the cameras suddenly move towards the sky, or the images blur and don't focus on anything... Now I am interested in exactly these types of almost involuntary or leftover images. These are the moments that reveal a certain kind of temporality, something that has to do with the immediacy of the documented moment and essentially speaks of how the footage was made. Something else that emerges out of the Mosireen archive, and that I am interested in, is the repetitive nature of protest culture, which translates into its representation as well. In this sense, when I think of boredom, I think of this continuous, inevitable exercise of going back to the streets to protest and perform the same gestures: to film, to edit, and to archive.

A . A . The way I was thinking about boredom was more related to a condition you end up finding yourself in, particularly after a period of dramatic and rapid (social, political, sexual...) transformation. I recall actually two people mentioning this to me. The way Lina Atallah (editor in chief of Mada Masr, a platform for independent journalism in Egypt, ed.) was talking about it to me, or maybe just the way I understood it, was related to a feeling reached unconsciously in order to overcome paranoia, anxiety and fear, for your own life and/or the lives of others. An almost neurological reaction that simply normalizes the state of things, a way of survival. Alexandros Tzannis (artist and activist based in Athens) talked about it in a radically different way when referring to the state of things in Greece in the summer of 2016, a moment in which any hope for another political form had simply vanished, and even the "critical" mass was just passively waiting for a future written by others to happen. I guess that both aspects of this "state of feeling" emerge in this exhibition, the most obvious of which are the images of the Tora courtroom where simply nothing happens, or the hours in between clashes...

J . M . Maybe this emerges in the exhibition through a focus on both the eventfulness and uneventfulness that surrounds a political event. I think that participation in protests as a form of engagement in the political realm comes from an urgent need to be a tangible part of a struggle. I am also convinced that participation implies a will to change the contemporary protest culture, to be creative with it, and this for me, as a filmmaker, comes after the actual event has taken place, when I have had time to reflect upon it. When looking back at a moment through footage that I captured, for instance, a prolonged shot of a man waving a flag, I often realize that these images need to be given time and to be contextualized. I usually attempt to get closer to the event or the subjects I am looking at, to reconstruct that moment with all the details, including all the "boring", repetitive, banal or mundane actions. I want to reconstruct the moment in its entirety, by not only focusing on violence, heroism, or pathos. I look at an event up close, and like in Bergman's *dragon*, everything is red.

P . C . W . *Tool-mobile phone* was produced through a combination of screen capture and performance, and combines elements of Text Edit, video viewing platforms, and folders of files from your hard drives. Meanwhile, *Timeline video I* and *II* highlight how filmic material appears on an editing table. In both these cases your process of filmmaking is transparent, revealing in the final product the labor that went into it. What would you say drew you to these forms of filmmaking? And how do you see them fitting not only within the context of your research into the archive, but also within your video practice?

J . M . Screen grabbing in *Tool-mobile phone* allows me to simultaneously take notes and reshuffle footage, and unpack the meanings that it carries. There is something spontaneous about this process, something of an attempt to sketch out a story, but without giving it a beginning or end. As for the timelines it is not so important to know how they were made, or where they come from. I think of them as found footage looped and projected, removed from their original context, where they were filmed. They were extracted from the 858.ma Archive and the timeline view is one of the many ways in which footage can be seen on the platform. In these two videos the angle and the length of the shot is quite different from most of what is in the archive. One depicts a man with a flag on a pole shot during the 18 days in 2011 ("18 days" refers to the period between January 25, starting day of the protest, and February 11, the day on which the president was overthrown, ed.) while the other is a long piece of footage capturing the Mohammed Mahmoud battle (a street battle that took place between protesters and security forces in downtown Cairo which left more than 50 protesters dead and dozens wounded, ed.) shot from my friend's balcony. Both are long shots, camera fixed on a tripod, footage captured largely from one angle, thus offering a different perspective on what

happened back then, or perhaps a point of observation without an opinion. I remember that when filming these videos I was feeling a certain exhaustion with the usual mode of participation, the kind that involved a more physical presence in the street: running with the camera, making sure to have 10 seconds of a steady shot, so as to later be able to include it in a quickly edited video to upload online.

A . A . Can you also introduce the different films, or fragments thereof, that feature in the show, particularly the ones somehow gravitating around the research that you've brought forward in the last two years, both alone and together with Philip Rizk? Here I mean, for example, the interview with the lawyer, the interview with Mostafa Bahgat, also known as Tata, as well as Rizk's footage of the Tora Courtroom. And could you also explain how these films and fragments relate to the images produced by Essam Aly Allam?

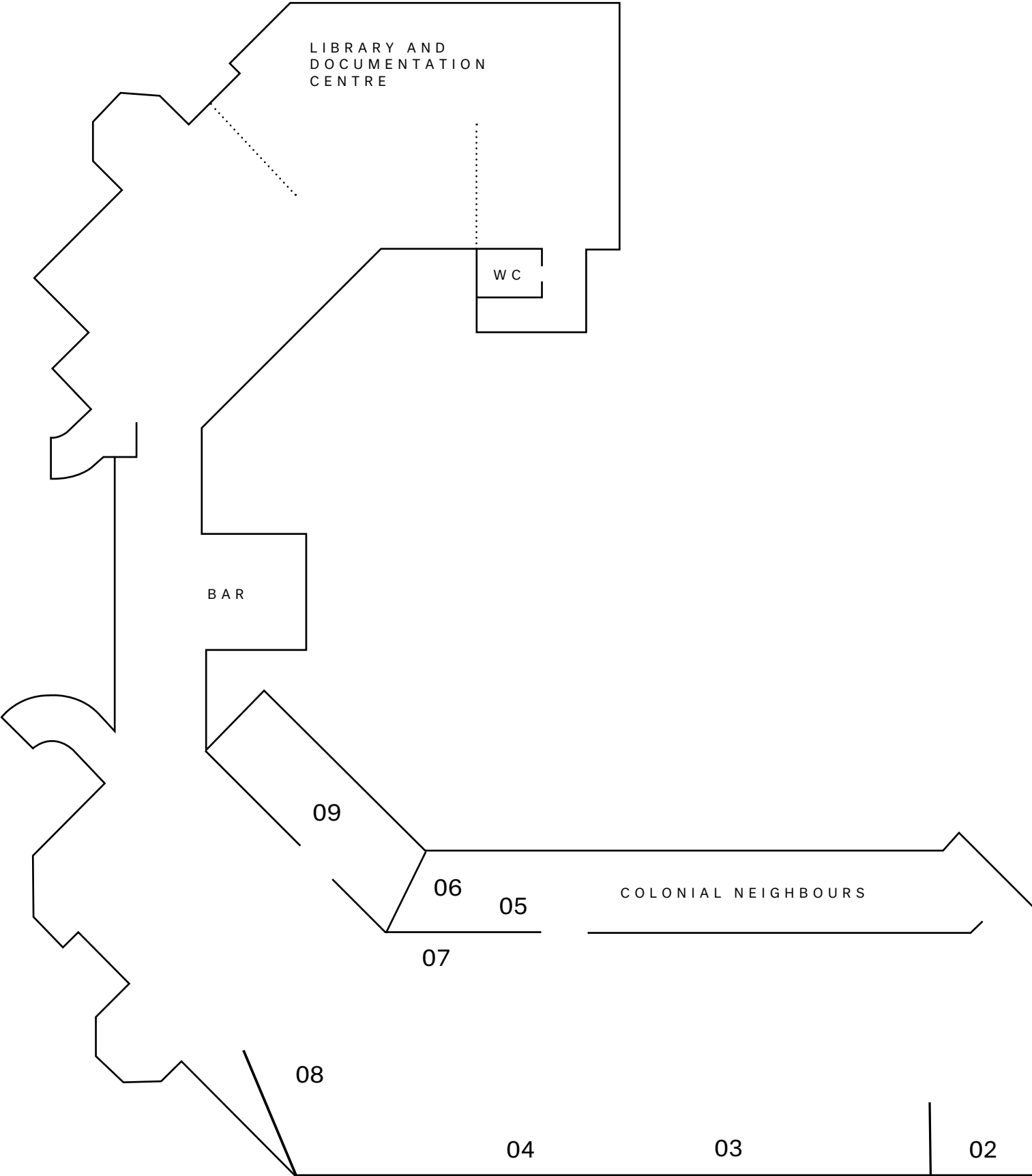
J . M . The exhibition space forms an extensive corridor, with many acute angles and screens attached to the walls on hinges. As you walk through this corridor-like space, the works build upon each other creating layers of meanings. A bit like how on a video timeline disparate pieces gradually come together in a linear manner; here the works are edited into the physical space of the gallery. When you work with such political materials, and then show them in an art space in another context, there's an inevitable danger of missing something, or of fetishizing certain types of imagery, which was taken in a very different cultural, social and political context and in a particular historical period. Right before you enter the exhibition, you can see a short interview with a young lawyer who, in a humorous manner, tells us about how his dress code at work has changed the way his friends see him, and the impact it has had on how society perceives him. Further on you see a large projection capturing the Tora courtroom in Cairo, and you witness a judge and his colleagues as they enter the courtroom and the rituals involved in that theatrical moment of ingress (both excerpts come from an ongoing research project titled "On Trials," which I am working on with Philip Rizk). Then there's Essam, a former worker in the Starch and Glucose factory in Helwan. He is presenting the illegal demolition of his workspace through footage taken with his phone back in 2012. He filmed for a period of four months, collecting more than seven hours of footage, in order to use this material as evidence in court of the illegal destruction of the factory. You also see a conversation between Mostafa Bahgat (activist, film-maker and producer, ed.) and me, where he shares information about his strategies on how to film a political event in different situations. Essam was ultimately not allowed to present his filmic evidence in front of a judge and Mostafa was not allowed to film testimonies during the court proceedings. In both cases, the authorities have crushed any attempt to utilize video evidence.

A . A . I think that the piece *6 Lessons with Alaa*,

produced particularly for this exhibition, is a central work within it. As you mentioned in a recent metro conversation, this work somehow brings together both the issue of how to represent a political event and also how that same event is transformed when it enters the white cube of an exhibition space. Alaa Abdullatif herself, an Egyptian performer who recently moved to Berlin and who lived in Cairo during the historical moment portrayed here, becomes a sort of middle-ground, a character that could and does exist in both places (the gallery and *that* political moment).

J . M . The different modes of recording that exist, the many tools you can use for it, the camera angles you can take, etc. are what influenced the conception of this work. The text is inspired by my research on various "how to film" tutorials I found online, interviews with activists and human rights defenders, and videos that were shot from the position of an onlooker-participant-protester. I subtracted from these visual materials their original intention, being interested instead in their modes of production. I examine what kinds of tools were being used and how relevant or irrelevant they were. The text she performs is detached from the political event, from the urgency. Alaa performs a body that is trying to teach the viewer how to re-enact, while no longer being part of the moment. Lost in gestures, lost in language, our bodies are left without their original political agency. I became obsessed with the raw footage on the website 858.ma, annotating fragments in the archive that superficially seem less informative or representative of that historical period than the canonical images of violence and heroism that we know. What interested me were the in-between shots, camera movements, blurs, blues of skies, and other fragments that are often edited out from films. Within this world, I introduce Alaa; a performer, a musician, a friend, who is here as herself, together with me, trying not to make sense of what happened.

FLOORPLAN



01 U N T I T L E D Interview with lawyer
from A F T E (Association of Freedom of Thought
and Expression) 00:02:49 2016

02 U N T I T L E D Excerpt from footage
filmed at the Tora Courthouse in collaboration
with Mostafa Bahgat 00:01:26 2016

03 T I M E L I N E V I D E O I
Footage extracted from 858.ma archive
00:21:39 2018

04 T I M E L I N E V I D E O II
Footage extracted from 858.ma archive
01:14:30 2018

05 E V I D E N C E O F A B S E N C E
Book 108 pages 2017

06 E S S A M ' S M O B I L E P H O N E
F O O T A G E Footage by Essam Aly Allam
07:15:05 2012

07 T O O L - M O B I L E P H O N E
Desktop grab video 00:11:19 2018

08 6 L E S S O N S W I T H A L A A
Video performance/installation 00:14:56 2018

09 U N T I T L E D Interview with Mostafa Bahgat,
audio, subtitles 00:12:00 2018

J A S M I N A M E T W A L Y

Born to an Egyptian father and a Polish mother, J A S M I N A M E T W A L Y is a Cairo-Berlin based artist and filmmaker, and member of *Mosireen* collective. She works in video and film, and has recently started drawing again. She likes to work with people and their histories, texts, archives, images, scripts and drawings. She is interested in how stories create stories, and how they leave the space of one reality and enter another, intertwining the boundaries of both. Rooted in performance and theatre, her works focus on process-based practices that have a social function that generates tension between participants and audiences.

M E T W A L Y ' S work has been exhibited at international art venues and festivals including Townhouse Gallery in Cairo, IFFR, Sfeir- Semler Gallery and Berlinale Forum Expanded. Since 2010 she has also collaborated on projects with filmmaker Philip Rizk. Together, they have recently co-curated a program *How to Act: On Stages and Storytellers at Beirut, in Cairo*. In 2015, their feature-length film, *Out on the Street*, was presented in the German Pavilion at the 56th Venice Biennale and at MoMA within the exhibition *Films from Here: Recent views from the Arab world*. In 2017 she was an artist in residency at the DAAD in Berlin.

EXIT
PLANTAGENSTRASSE

01

MORE INFORMATION

savvy-contemporary.com
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THANK YOU

We would like to thank the following individuals and institutions for their support in making this exhibition possible and in stimulating the thoughts and discussions from which it arose.

Alaa Abdullatif for her performance; Philip Rizk with whom Metwaly collaborated on projects *Out on the Street* and *On Trials*; Alisa Lebow and her project *Filming Revolution*; *Mosireen Media Collective* and the *858.MA Archive of Resistance*; Sebastian Lütgert and Jan Gerber pan.do/ra; Max Schneider for providing sound equipment; Kamila Metwaly for operating sound equipment; Abhishek Nilamber for his assistance operating sound equipment; Essam Aly Allam for his footage and interview; Mostafa Bahgat for his interview; Salma Tarzi for her assistance with the Arabic to English translation; Jens Maier-Rothe for being in ongoing conversation with both artist and curator since months; Ola Zielinska for her support with text editing and graphic design skills; Vangjush Vellahu for helping with the final editing process; Gwen Mitchell, Olani Ewunnet, and Dorota Metwaly for their assistance finding archival footage; Arsenal Institute for Film and Video Art and especially Stefanie Schulte-Strathaus; Bert Gunther for his support with the technical conception of the show and its installation. And Loscil for *The Making of Grief Point*.

S A V V Y Contemporary – The laboratory of form-ideas is an art space, discursive platform, place for good talks, foods and drinks – a space for conviviality. S A V V Y Contemporary situates itself at the threshold of notions of the West and non-West, to understand and deconstruct them. S A V V Y Contemporary has realized a kaleidoscope of art exhibitions, performances, film screenings, lectures, concerts, readings, talks, dances. SAVVY Contemporary has established a participatory archive on German colonial history, a performance arts documentation centre, a library, a residency program, as well as educational projects with schools. The art space engages in its neighborhood's history and socio-political realities which are entangled with the reflections and discourses of the project.

S A V V Y Contemporary is Elena Agudio Antonia Alampi Jasmina Al-Qaisi Aouefa Amoussouvi Víctor Arráez Lynhan Balatbat Juan Blanco Marleen Boschen Federica Bueti Pia Chakraverti-Wuerthwein Olani Ewunnet Raisa Galofre Johanna Gehring Andrea Gyimesi Sol Izquierdo Anna Jäger Cornelia Knoll Saskia Köbschall Kelly Krugman Nathalie Mba Bikoro Kamila Metwaly Gwen Mitchell Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung Abhishek Nilamber Beya Othmani Elena Quintarelli Marleen Schröder Jörg-Peter Schulze Lema Sikod Lili Somogyi Jorinde Spletstößer Marlon Van Rooyen Laura Voigt Elsa Westreicher Johanna Wild

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