

# PAST IS NOT POST

February 2–March 19, 2017

OPENING: February 1, 7pm

CURATOR'S TALK: Benj Gerdes: February 2, 7pm

CURATOR'S TALK: Lasse Lau: February 28, 7pm

Artists:

Pia Arke & Anders Jørgensen, Petra Bauer, Matthew Buckingham, Kajsa Dahlberg, Michelle Dizon, Benj Gerdes, Andrea Geyer, Regina José Galindo, Jan Peter Hammer, Sven Johné, William E. Jones, Lasse Lau, Maha Maamoun, Robert Ochshorn, Rania Rafei & Raed Rafei, Benjamin Tiven, Sarah Vanagt & Katrien Vermeire, Raed Yassin, Akram Zaatari

Curated by Benj Gerdes & Lasse Lau

Kran Film Collective

*Past is Not Post* examines a growing number of artists working in relationship to archival research or investigations of historical memory. While the sites, methods, and circumstances of these practices remain diverse, there is a common artistic impulse to work through history as a backdoor when options in the present seem closed. Given the ambiguous role of artists in contemporary societies, particularly the difficulty of connecting to existing political and social struggles, the intersectional and incomplete stories of the past offer alternate approaches. Can this engagement of the past create spaces to rearticulate our collective possibilities and demands, spaces emblematic of both resistance and retreat?

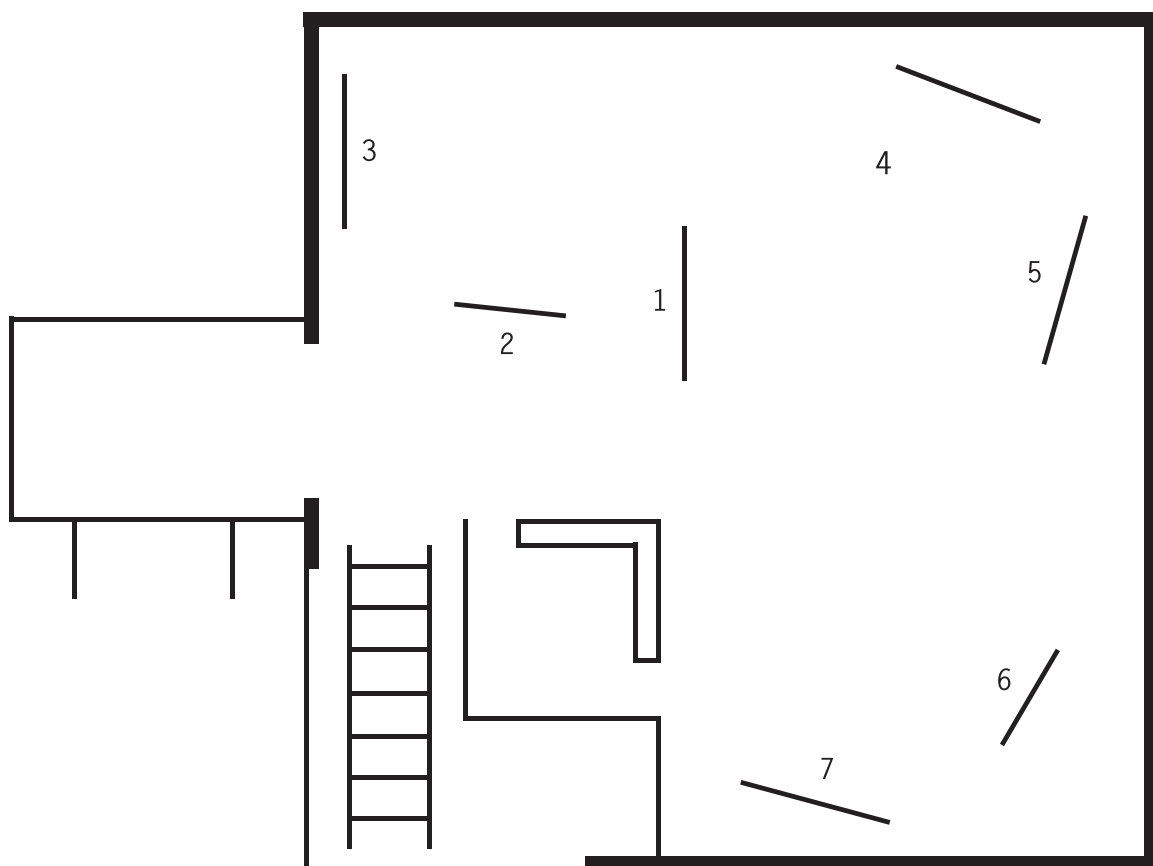
While these techniques are by no means new, the 21st century emergence of the film/video essay or archival image appropriation as mainstream rather than marginal modes of production—prevalent within art and increasingly popular on online video platform—is very new indeed. Camera-based moving and still images, those privileged repositories of the foment and failure of 19th and 20th century revolutionary movements, are now firmly-established within art. Despite the present cultural awareness of these media's almost complete manipulability, there remains a paradoxical "special relationship" between the camera and history, perhaps no longer resting on common notions of empirical truth but instead the search for political affect, kernels of potentiality viewed in light of what is missing today.

Why do artists continue to find revisiting the past a useful way of working? How do we ask such questions while at the same time recognizing the many important inventions and struggles by artists, filmmakers, and historians to render visible histories of oppression and marginalization? This production takes place amid perpetually unfolding global ecological and political crises, on the one hand, alongside insurrectionary protests

and massive popular mobilizations on the other. The present, with its shifting urgencies and fleeting attention spans, complicates our relationship to these projects: one moment they may resonate as insurrectionary and powerful, the next as a form of refuge from more pressing questions.

*Past is Not Post* corresponds with an ongoing inquiry of the Edith-Russ-Haus into artistic revisitations of history and the uses of archival materials, both creative and subversive, to interrogate the present. Here, in a constellation of almost 20 projects, what can we learn from the points of resonance and dissonance emerging through their spatial and thematic adjacency? These works compel a public as both practical objects and allegorical encounters, particularly as they together invite one to consider the cultural production of meaning and knowledge. They call upon us not as recipients of history, but as agents of the future.

#### [GROUND FLOOR]



## 1 SARAH VANAGT & KATRIEN VERMEIRE (BE)

*The Wave*, 2012

HD Video, 20 min

Spanish, English subtitles

In *The Wave* the archaeological gaze of the viewer is set in motion: a mass grave from the Spanish Civil War (1936–39) opens and closes itself. In 2011 we placed a camera above the spot where nine victims were buried after their execution by Franco's supporters in June 1939. On day one of the excavation, a digging crane gently loosened the top layer of soil, until the archaeologists came across a skull with a bullet hole. Then the archaeologists continued their work by hand. The skeletons appeared, then disappeared, as if a strong wind blew that removed the sand and uncovered death, a primal truth.

## 2 MAHA MAAMOUN (EG)

*Night Visitor: The Night of Counting the Years*

2011

Video, 8 min

Maha Maamoun compiled footage that had been posted on YouTube. The clips, filmed on mobile phones, document the break-in at the State Security buildings in Cairo and Damanhur in 2011 after the first wave of the Egyptian revolution. The subtitle refers to a 1969 Egyptian film, *The Night of Counting the Years* (aka *The Mummy*), by Shadi Abd al-Salam, in which experimental camera angles, colours and slow edits gave the film a dreamlike quality similar to Maamoun's nightmarish compilation. Maamoun's sensitive editing organises raw material into a story with chapters, while guiding the audience into the belly of the beast. The dark and loaded footage captures the symbolic gestures of revolutionaries when faced with the hidden nightmares of an oppressive regime. A shaky camera scans the car park where brand new cars are proof of the corrupt wealth of the ruling class, in a dark cellar torch light reveals wall scratches documenting the suffering of the people in the underground prison. In contrast to the plight of the imprisoned, up in the offices brightly lit cabinets host gilded artefacts of dubious origins, framed images of those in power, and phones with direct lines to the presidential office. The revolutionary as the cameraman here plays several roles from the treasure hunter to the citizen journalist searching for proof.

## 3 BENJ GERDES (US)

*Years of Saturdays*

2015

HD Video, 11 min

Intermittently since 1967 and consistently since shortly after September 11, 2001, a group of activists has met every Saturday morning to continue to protest the US-led invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq in front of a small-town post office and former federal courthouse in rural Pennsylvania (this is one of many such sites). At the height of anti-war mobilizations, and later during the spread of Occupy movements, one reportedly witnessed a large crowd. Now, this has dwindled to a handful of elderly activists, no one younger than seventy and one in his nineties. The artist returns to the scene of his original political upbringing as a 13 year-old protesting the first Gulf War (1991). Instead of staying behind the camera, making the portrait he'd intended to shoot, the filmmaker faces the awkwardness of filming a four-person protest, and becomes, briefly, a participant.

#### 4 REGINA JOSÉ GALINDO (GT)

*Tierra* (Earth)

2013

HD Video, 33 min

No dialogue

The land around where the artist is standing is being removed by an excavator, a reference to the mass graves of those who “disappeared” during the military regime of Efraín Ríos Montt. Montt was praised by Ronald Reagan as “a man of great personal integrity and commitment,” who was recently acquitted for genocide and crimes against humanity.

#### 5 MATTHEW BUCKINGHAM (US)

*Image of Absalon To Be Projected Until It Vanishes*

2001

Slide Projection and Text

Absalon, the Danish warrior-bishop and quasi-mythic founder of the city of Copenhagen, used the wealth he plundered during the crusades to build himself a castle and commission the first written history of the Danish people. A single 35mm slide depicting an equestrian portrait sculpture of Absalon is projected in the exhibition space. The heat from the projector lamp slowly „burns“ the slide’s photo-emulsion, causing a protracted, almost cinematic, dissolve or „fade-to-white.“ A framed text adjacent to the projection draws parallels between Absalon’s battles and the much later civic battles in Copenhagen to memorialize him in the form of public sculpture.

#### 6 BENJAMIN TIVEN (US)

*A Third Version of the Imaginary*

2012

HD Video, 12 min

Swahili, English subtitles

*A Third Version of the Imaginary* traces an encounter with the video and film library of the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation in Nairobi. We follow the station’s librarian through tightly-packed shelves of video cassettes: he is searching for a specific image, and must sift through the identifying paperwork from a number of tapes.

#### 7 LASSE LAU (DK)

*Sound from the Hallways*

2012

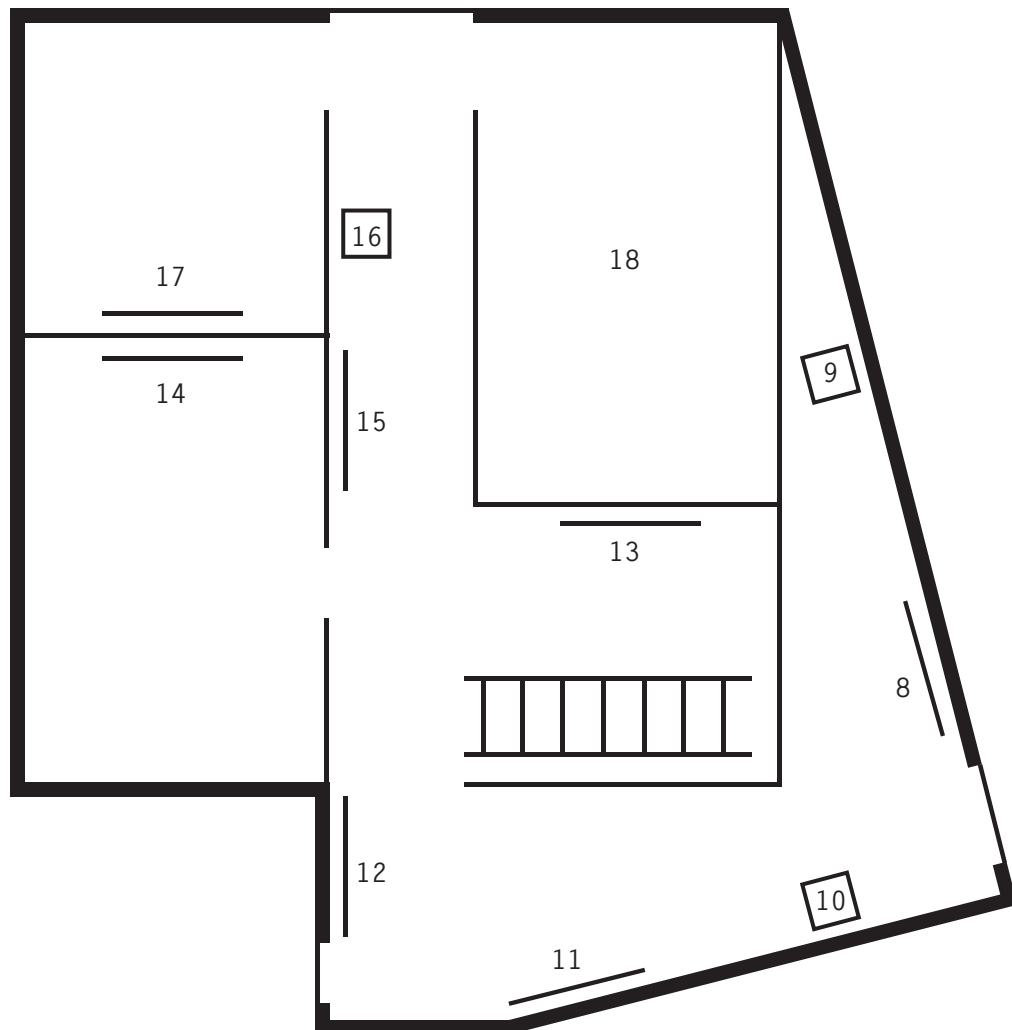
HD Video, 25 min

No dialogue

*Sound from the Hallways* takes us through a series of the Cairo Museum’s antique collections, as objects of men, women, faros, animals, and armies slowly glide pass the gaze of the viewer something intrusive is on the verge of happening. The film documents the atmosphere of one of the most classic and visually dense collections on display in the world before its buildings and modus operandi becomes history. ,The true picture of the

past flits by. The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again.' (Walter Benjamin ,On the concept of history')

[BASEMENT FLOOR]



## 8 ROBERT OCHSHORN (US)

*A Little Bit More Stable*

2015

HD Video, 3 min

English, No subtitles

Much like the stabilized video from military drones, which allow commanders to observe and interfere with unfamiliar territory from aerial vantage, *A Little Bit More Stable* takes the viewer above and outside the normal passage of motion picture time. The source material, a promotion for video stabilization software that has been commercialized from its military applications, depicts the stabilization of home movies and implies a similar steadying influence on the lives of would-be customers.

## 9 SVEN JOHNE (DE)

*Wissower Klinken* (Cliffs of Wissow)

2007

Video, 8 min

German, English subtitles

Sven Johne painstakingly investigates real incidents or current events in eastern Germany. Vacillating between reality and fiction, he characterizes the results as serious reports. With the assistance of a male voice choir from the north of Leipzig, Sven Johne composed a requiem – *Wissower Klinken* – for the tourist guide Klaus Bartels, who died in 2005 when he was crushed by rocks falling from cliffs on Rügen. Two years after his death, the guide known for his “Musical Rambles” across the island was accompanied to his grave with this song in the hiking tradition. But the respectful rendering by these motionless singers has little in common with the type of singing celebrated by Bartels. Rather, this work interprets a musical culture, mindful of the situation for which it is being performed. The narration and the singing, the two aspects to *Wissower Klinken* unfolding in parallel like counterpoint, make this both a radio play and a concert, but also a thriller, a classical tragedy and – many would even say – a fairy tale.

## 10 PIA ARKE & ANDERS JØRGENSEN (GL, DK)

*Tupilakosaurus*

1999

SD Video, 10 mins

Danish, English Subtitles.

In the video, the artist visits the Geological Museum in Copenhagen, where she patiently listens to the Head of Department’s somewhat arid account about his predecessor and model, Eigil Nielsen. A story condensed with Latin classifications concerning the finding of a Triassic vertebrate in North East Greenland. The camera cross-cuts to the artist, who is firmly handling and stacking the image proof sheets at the same time as we hear a reading of the Tupilak myth, which, briefly related, has to do with a shaman, who makes a tupilak from various animal and human bones (and other more vital parts), after which he gives it life so that it acquires supernatural powers. Arke makes a crucial statement about how Greenland, rather than being an untouched and pure place, is a construction created by all the finds, descriptions, images, mappings, and colonizations that Western – and especially Danish – explorers, missionaries, and colonizers have brought in the country.

## 11 JAN PETER HAMMER (DE)

*Gedenktafel für die Verlierer der Wiedervereinigung* (Memorial for the Losers of the Reunification)

2013

Bronze, 91cm x 107cm

After the Berlin wall fell, in 1989, the economical conversion of the now defunct DDR was accomplished virtually overnight. The citizens of the former east were ill-equipped to deal with the liberalization of the housing market. Living in a Socialist country means not having access to capital, and the DDR’s pensions proved meagre when having to live up to West German living costs. As vast swathes of real estate were sold off to investors, most citizens of the former East were prized out of their homes.

*Gedenktafel für die Verlierer der Wiedervereinigung* is a commemorative bronze plate reminiscent of the former east tradition – inspired by the remaining socialist memorials like the five part memorial “Befreiung” by Günter Schütz, which is installed over the Schönhauser Allee bridge. “It is meant as a memorial for all our lost

neighbours, for all the aging workers and pensioners, who were replaced by the dapper families and sleek professionals that now populate East Berlin.” - Jan Peter Hammer

## 12 WILLIAM E JONES (US)

*Killed Photographs*

2015

9 Inkjet prints on paper, 20 x 25 cm

Prints of 130 tri-toned black-and-white images scanned from negatives in the collection of the Library of Congress. Jones's book is the first to deal exclusively with the 35mm negatives that FSA (Farm Security Administration)\* director Roy Stryker destroyed with a hole punch during the early years of the project (1935-39). The book brings to light destroyed or defaced photographs by Walker Evans, Ben Shahn, John Vachon, and others; it also includes two essays by Jones discussing the images and possible reasons for their suppression.

\*Initially created as the Resettlement of (RA) in 1935 as part of the New Deal in the United States the Farm Security Administration (FSA) was an effort during the Depression to combat American rural poverty.

## 13 ANDREA GEYER (DE)

*Gezeiten* (Tides)

2015

HD Video, 41 minutes

German, English

Based on materials from the artist's grandmother, Marga Federlin's (1899 – 1991) archive of over 6000 slides, *Gezeiten* examines German post war history through a multi-layered space of images and audio. The photos taken during 25 trips across Europe, North Africa and Russia between 1962-1975, Geyer highlights women at this time, focusing on Federlin's traveling companions, the buses they rode, and the landscapes they saw. No longer posing in portraits and standing by, Geyer reflects on the everyday women who are shown taking an active role in history.

## 14 PETRA BAUER (SE)

*Sisters!*

2011

HD Video, 81 minutes

English, No subtitles

*Sisters!* was born out of a collaboration between Swedish artist Petra Bauer and Southall Black Sisters (SBS), a radical, West London-based feminist organization. The film documents a week in the life of the organization that is more of a partnership between Bauer and the SBS staff, than specifically about SBS. The SBS has been politically engaged in the social and political conditions of minority women since 1979. The film follows the daily activities of the group and creates a cinematic conversation on politics and feminism in our current society.

RANIA RAFEI & RAED RAFEI (LB)

*74 (The reconstitution of a struggle)*

2012

HD Video, 95 mins

Arabic, English Subtitles

Lebanon 1974: Students demonstrate against a tuition increase. For 37 days, they occupy university offices. Any resemblance to recent events is completely intentional. With the Lebanese student revolt of 1974 as their starting point, filmmakers Rania and Raed Rafei direct an absorbing documentary on the core issues of revolution and democracy. They use the strategy of re-enactment but also include theatrical improvisations in which activists give their interpretations of the student leaders' actions in '74. The simplicity of the film's direction lets us focus on the debates, by turns impassioned, intelligent and even annoying thanks to their ideologically driven didacticism. How do you change the world? The question has never been more relevant.

15 KAJSA DAHLBERG (SE)

*A Room of One's Own / A Thousand Libraries*

2006

Book piece in an edition of 1000 copies

*A Room of One's Own / A Thousand Libraries* is a compilation of all the marginal notes made by readers in the Swedish library copies of Virginia Woolf's 1929 essay. *For the desire to read, like all the other desires which distract our unhappy souls, is capable of analysis.* –Virginia Woolf, Sir Thomas Browne, 1923

16 RAED YASSIN (LB)

*Disco*

2010

SD Video, 5 mins

No dialogue, English Subtitles

*Disco* tells the story of the artist's father, a disco-addict and a fashion designer who leaves his family to find work abroad, eventually becoming a film star in the Egyptian horror industry. This quickly spirals into a fiction, however, in which the father becomes Egyptian film star Mahmoud Yassin (who shares the director's family name). The interplay of image and text explores a generation's fascination with celebrity, forging a story about abandonment, voyage, longing, and stardom.

17 AKRAM ZAATARI (LB)

*Red Chewing Gum*

2000

SD Video, 11 min

Arabic, English Subtitles

Cast: Nabil Kojok, and Ziad Antar

*Red Chewing Gum* is a video letter that reflects on fleeting time. It's an excavation of a memory of a first love recorded on videotape. It is equally a reflection on an urban change in Hamra district in Beirut. Through it unfolds a story of love and separation between two men.



18 MICHELLE DIZON (US)

*Civil Society*

2008

3-channel SD video installation, 37 mins

English, No subtitles

*Civil Society* deals with events of civil unrest in Los Angeles in 1992 and on the outskirts of Paris in 2005. Looking at both events, separated by time and geography (with an additional address of the Watts Riots of 1965), the piece examines racialization, as well as the political conditions of visibility and invisibility, in the mainstream perception of a riot. By dispersing the images across three screens, Dizon moves to deconstruct traditional montage. In „holding open the cuts” across these screens, Dizon creates room for the experience of loss – both the loss of the two young men killed in the Clichy Sous-Bois revolts and the language, family, and homeland lost for a second-generation citizen.