CCS BARD ARCHIVES

Basel Abbas and Ruanne Abou-Rahme
Presented in conjunction with the exhibition *Boundary Monuments Dissolve*, curated by Katherine C. M. Adams
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Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College
Annandale on Hudson, N.Y.

[00:00:01.020] - **Katherine C. M. Adams**
Hi everyone, thanks so much for joining us today. We'll go ahead and get started. As you know, this is a conversational program with Basel Abbas and Ruanne Abou-Rahme, who've joined us today. So I'll introduce the artists and share a little bit about the framework of this talk and kind of how our conversation started, and then we'll open up into a sort of more open conversation program, and then later on as well, if you have questions, please feel free to also pose other inquiries to the artists. So Basel Abbas and Ruanne Abou-Rahme work together across a range of sound, image, text, installation, and performance practices. Their practice is engaged in the intersections between performativity, political imaginaries, the body, and virtuality. Across their works, they probe a contemporary landscape marked by a seemingly perpetual crisis and an endless present, one that is shaped by a politics of desire and disaster. Their solo presentations include MoMA in New York, the Migros Museum in Zurich, the Art Institute of Chicago, Centraal Museum in Utrecht, Kunstverein Hamburg, and many others. Selected group exhibitions include Portikus in Frankfurt, the Mistake Room in Los Angeles, ICA London, the Sharjah Biennial, Berlin Biennial, and many, many additional projects.

[00:01:29.700] - **Katherine C. M. Adams**
They've also held performances at MoMA, the Fisher Center here at Bard, E-flux in New York, the Hammer Museum, and various other venues. Among other awards, they're recipients of the Sharjah Biennial Prize in 2015 and the Abraaj Prize in 2016. And so this conversation, just to start us off, if you saw the description, we're kind of entering Basel and Ruanne's practice through the framework of the screenshot, which is of course, as we all know, it's a way for people to capture online images within the frame of their devices. But it also, I think, within the artist's practice represents a kind of broader interest in cultural sampling, kind of forging associative links between various locations, particularly in Palestine where the artists work and various cultural artifacts. In addition to talking about that motif and kind of process within their work, I'd like to kind of open it

up as well into other modalities that Basel and Ruanne work with. For example, we have talked previously about how screenshots for them are not merely archival, but also actually have a kind of performative aspect, what they've talked about as liveness.

[00:02:48.380] - **Katherine C. M. Adams**
I think we'll go ahead and start there. So if you might want to just share a bit to start about the idea of the screenshot as it figures in your work and maybe that series that you have.

[00:03:02.620] - **Ruanne Abou-Rahme**
Yep. Do you want to go first?

[00:03:05.360] - B**asel Abbas**
There's so much to say about it. I don't know. I guess— I don't remember when we started working on it, but I feel like it was 2015 or 2014.

[00:03:17.040] - **Ruanne Abou-Rahme**
It was before that.

[00:03:18.470] - **Basel Abbas**
I think that it sort of came as, you know, you said the word liveness before, and I think that was a large draw for us in terms of the screenshot itself, but I feel that I mean, like you said, everyone takes screenshots, and I think, you know, as part of like a research or as part of— but the idea of liveness was sort of this thing that we carried on from our practice that started off many years before with how we work with sound, actually, and that we then sort of worked on thinking about spatially when we show our work. And then sort of the screenshot came more from the research and thinking about how different threads and different openings of the work could be also presented in an exhibition format as well. So that's where I think the line of the screenshot came in, and

it's kind of, you know, when you have sound and video and text, and you kind of have this moment in time where you sort of capture that moment. And a lot of the ways that we work in the studio is actually on our sound and video pieces, it is very live, so we have live softwares that we use where we are kind of jamming more or less with sound and video and images.

[00:05:08.820] - **Basel Abbas**
And even though that's how we first started working together, like in a more performance live setting. So when we work on installs or even videos, we sort of think of ideas and jam together in the studio and record hours and hours of sound and video and, we use softwares like Ableton Live and Resolume, which are sort of live video and live audio softwares. So we record that and then we sort of start reconstructing and constructing things. All this to say that the screenshot was a very, like, very natural or very organic way for us to carry all these like formal and conceptual things that we were working through and thinking about.

[00:05:59.610] - **Ruanne Abou-Rahme**
I suppose that a lot of it is also about the kind of unscripted connections or associations between different, what could seem like disparate times and spaces, spaces, and in a way, like, the desktop sort of becomes this space in which you can connect these moments. And there's something quite unscripted in it in the sense that it's very often us working through things and then arriving to a moment that is not necessarily very planned beforehand, but kind of really speaks to a certain condition. And so that's why we started to capture those moments because we tend to, when we're working, kind of work between all these modes and materials that are emerging from different contexts and times and spaces, so it became interesting for us to use the desktop as a container that allows for unscripted sort of connections to emerge.

[00:07:05.430] - **Katherine C. M. Adams**

And on that note, I wonder if maybe you can share also a little bit about the project that you started in 2016, and *Yet My Mask Is Powerful*, where you were using this strategy, but also specifically in relationship to spaces in Palestine that have been destroyed, kind of as a way, I think maybe of recovery, restoration, but also as you've talked about, a kind of like virtual time that you're playing with. So maybe sort of getting more towards screenshots also as a kind of access point to a specific space.

[00:07:50.340] - **Ruanne Abou-Rahme**
To give the context of that project, [it] starts with a poem by Adrienne Rich called called "Diving into the Wreck" in which she describes diving into the site of the wreckage and really thinking about the site of the wreckage not just as a site of trauma but as a kind of site of potential in itself, which was very significant to us at a time where not only in Palestine but in the wider Arab world, you know, whole living fabrics were being destroyed and erased and eradicated, and to really think about how can we in these moments not just survive the moment but generate a different possibility, a different opening. And then at that time we were very— I mean, a lot of our works are really drawing from people's practices, so we were very inspired by the trips that young Palestinians were making to the sites of destroyed villages that were depopulated in 1948. And they were going back to these villages and really reactivating them and putting them in the frame of a kind of living time rather than a dead fossilized time, so they would camp out there.

[00:09:14.640] - **Ruanne Abou-Rahme**
There were weddings that were happening in some of these villages, and so what really emerged was that there was essentially a struggle over time between the Palestinians and the settler colonial state, which is trying to say these are destroyed villages, they're done, they're dead, they're closed off, and this kind of insistence that people could return and reactivate them as a living space. And when we started to make these trips to the sites, it was very kind of the sense that we had that was very overwhelming was

that, you know, in a particular moment when you were in these sites, you could imagine a time that was not occupied. It wasn't necessarily a clear imminent future time, but it was almost in this virtual time of potential. And so a very large form of the project is trying to think about formally what is this virtual time and how can we articulate it into some kind of aesthetic form. And in that way, I think those kinds of openings that you have in the screenshots, the unscripted associations, are kind of speaking to that idea of virtuality. I mean, there's so much more because we were working with Neolithic I mean, it's a very big project, so I don't know where to start because we were working also with Neolithic masks that we discovered online that we then— that had been looted and were being shown in the Israel Museum in Jerusalem.

[00:10:58.670] - **Ruanne Abou-Rahme**
And then it was this process of also printing the masks, making them into a kind of material again, using them for performances in the sites. And then sort of recirculating them online and recirculating certain narratives about them online. So there's all these kinds of mutations that we're interested in between material space and virtual space.

[00:11:26.410] - **Basel Abbas**
I mean, just to add one thing, like Ruanne said, there's so much to say about it, but like essentially when we were filming the work, when we took those trips to the destroyed villages, we weren't really interested in documenting the villages as destroyed sites, but we were essentially trying to capture on camera and with sound this sort of slippages of time. So it's like this visceral experience of going through the site was what we were trying to capture through the video and the sound rather than document the ruins of the village, you see what I'm saying? And so that sort of like liveness or activation in the site while we are filming as part of the process of our work is something that we carried through into the screenshots in that whole project. I think actually even though we were doing screenshots before that was the project that solidified the sort of like screenshots, like as a series, let's say, that became, that was the project that was like, oh, okay,

yeah, this really makes sense with the way we work and the way we think and what we're trying to do.

[00:12:44.400] - **Katherine C. M. Adams**
On that note too, thinking about how certain imagery kind of moves throughout your practice in different works, different formats. Maybe we can talk a little bit more about how you bring this kind of archival material that you accumulate, or the footage, over time. I think, for example, I've been interested in how like the video calls, or like this kind of aesthetic of like an avatar, kind of emerges within your work at one point, and then it continues to re-emerge in other forms throughout later video works. And then I also know that these avatars as well are kind of in a way composite figures, also sort of drawn from documentation, for example, of protesters or sort of collective subject almost.

[00:13:40.750] - **Ruanne Abou-Rahme**
I think this was the first work where we were literally working with avatars, but you know, prior to that, the idea of the avatar was something that we were working with throughout our projects in a more kind of expanded sense, in the sense of almost the ability to become other, the ability to, the idea of characters shape-shifting, times, shape-shifting between each other, how is it that we kind of move away from a certain subjectivity and arrive to a certain collectivity that allows for a lot of multiplicity and kind of mutation in it. So I mean, with the previous work that we were talking about with the masks, I mean, we really thought about the masks as a kind of avatar, because these masks were used for all these kinds of rituals of connecting to the dead and this kind of becoming other almost. And with this work, initially the avatars were created from Palestinians that were marching in the March of Return in Gaza in 2019. And they were marching towards the border and trying to physically sort of manifest their right to return and to also break the siege of Gaza.

[00:15:17.780] - **Ruanne Abou-Rahme**
And they were unable to reach us and we were unable to reach them. And the more that we thought and sat with the kind of impossibilities of the film, physical condition, that's when we started to collect images of the protesters, and then through these images and ourselves, we created these kind of composites of these avatars that I think try to break the siege in a way, right? They try to think about ways in which we can rupture that impossibility of the physical condition because at the time we were in Ramallah, which is just one hour away, but we could not reach any of the protesters in Gaza. So it's mechanisms of, you know, how do we arrive at a certain collectivity in conditions that really try to crush a collectivity as well. And what does that mean? And of course, that kind of virtual manifestation has so many issues too with it, so part of the work is also thinking about the violence of the image itself because the app that we used, because we were using low-resolution images, it registers the missing data as glitches or scars on the avatars, so it's also speaking to the violence of representation and the violence of the algorithm too.

[00:16:54.830] - **Ruanne Abou-Rahme**
So it's not really necessarily constituting this sort of virtual as this kind of perfect space of, it's kind of sitting in that tension.

[00:17:05.450] - **Basel Abbas**
And it continues through our work of thinking about the idea of being anonymous as like the potential of being anonymous, the political potential from being able to be anonymous and in the virtual space as a potential. But like Ruanne said, not as a perfect space but as a potential space. We've had a really long engagement interest in that and then trying to activate that in different ways. So that's really a continuation of that. And then I think the avatars almost became another sort of extension of our practice, a little bit like the screenshot itself. And so actually the avatar appears as screenshots, later on as well in the work. In the work you're showing here, I think, as well,

right?

[00:18:06.540] - **Katherine C. M. Adams**
Yeah.

[00:18:07.040] - **Basel Abbas**
They come back through a sort of other— we also see our works themselves as alive and sort of improvise along the way and never really ending or having an endpoint, as much as we can at least.

[00:18:27.370] - **Katherine C. M. Adams**
On that note, maybe another thing to discuss too is that there's a sort of, you know, you have this strong engagement with web-based work, kind of this virtual component of your projects, but then many pieces as well are very attentive to the actual like agriculture and plants, things that are growing kind of over time, persisting within a specific environment, and I think that's another thing as well that's an imagery that reappears in a lot of folks that also use these very virtual or digital materials. So maybe we can talk a bit about how those kinds of interact. Because I think there are some interesting connections between how you use figures of growth, like actual natural growth, in parallel to this kind of other sort of persistence of images across the space.

[00:19:22.800] - **Basel Abbas**
I mean, I think that [regarding] the vegetation in the work, we're thinking about the virtual space not as a sort of like replacement of the physical space, because the physical space cannot really ever be replaced. That's just a side note. But the vegetation came into the project again from our trips to the villages, actually, like at least solidified with our trips to the destroyed villages because so many times that is the way that we found the village. So a lot of plants were like plants that were hidden when

the settlers destroyed the villages and planted with pine trees to either hide the village but also to change the contours of the landscape. So it was like pine trees and then eucalyptus, and eucalyptus kind of eats nutrients of all the plants around it. But also every year they have fires, huge fires, because they're not actually indigenous plants, right? So they're not set to the climate. And so the plants, the vegetation was a way that we could find these villages, and we sort of started to think about how this vegetation is alive in itself and the sites are actually living and they come back every spring and they resist the other vegetation.

[00:21:10.650] - **Basel Abbas**
And then the fires was another added thing that shows this sort of, you know, resistant aspect to non-human life forms. And then we started to sort of also think of the vegetation as an archive, but also vegetation as something that in our most recent work, the land and the vegetation, sort of how they hold memory. The non-living, the non-human, sorry, life forces and how they resist and their sort of practice became something very significant in our works. And as our works do live virtually and are interested in the virtual, they sort of keep circling back in and out from the virtual to the physical.

[00:22:11.200] - **Katherine C. M. Adams**
I think I have more questions, but I also want to open it up to questions from the audience if anyone has something they'd like to ask. So if you do, just raise your hand and I can get to you.

[00:22:36.310] - **Ruanne Abou-Rahme**
Go ahead.

[00:22:39.450] - **[Unknown speaker 1]**
I was wondering if you could say a little bit more about this thread that runs through.

Hearing you say about an idea of documentation, or a tension between an archive and documenting, and then what it actually means to push back against the archive as a, as a sort of dead space, right? And instead to sort of produce archives that are sort of anti-archives in a way, and that they're sort of generative rather than kind of documentary. And I think that also sort of resonates in how you were talking about these visits to the village, but also the sort of the way in which the land kind of reproduces and comes back every year. But this idea of being interested in— rather than sort of thinking about the past, thinking about an archive that is actually doing something else and it's kind of a reproductive subjective and objective archive that allows sort of space for imagining, particularly in a place like Palestine.

[00:23:41.600] - **Ruanne Abou-Rahme**
I mean absolutely, but I think so much of that goes back to the struggle over time because in any kind of colonial encounter, so much of it is about not only the erasure of your narrative your history, but it's also about fossilizing you into a certain moment and a certain time--fossilizing you into this dead time. So much of our work is really about this kind of living time and the activations and really thinking about any archival gesture as part of a kind of living archive. There's all kinds of ways that we are constantly constantly trying to think of how to think about sort of archival gestures or what would be seen as archival material as something that is able to mutate and to shift and to really be kind of embedded not only in the present but in this kind of future potential. So I think that's a really integral part of how we have been trying to work with anything archival, because, you know, for us, we get very fatigued from this idea that anything that's archival is sort of relegated to the past or something that is not changeable. So it's kind of really expanding that, thinking about, okay, how is the vegetation in these destroyed villages, how is that part part of an actual living archive, right, that is constantly shifting and changing and resisting that erasure and keeps returning in all these different forms.

[00:25:29.940] - **Ruanne Abou-Rahme**
I think that's a really kind of very powerful way to think about what is the archive, how is the body a sort of archive, is something that we also think a lot about in our practice, and I think it's a question of time, I mean, for us; we also work a lot in a non-linear way and think about time in a non-linear sense, so how can we get away from this idea of the past versus the present, but really think about how all these moments are almost like collapsed into each other to produce any given particular condition.

[00:26:10.180] - **Ruanne Abou-Rahme**
Something that we're constantly trying to do, and we're also like the performative, our performative practice of how we're trying to constantly animate and activate, and also inspired by how people are animating and activating.

[00:26:25.450] - **Basel Abbas**
Absolutely.

[00:26:26.440] - **Ruanne Abou-Rahme**
Whatever could be constituted as an archive, whether it's us collecting like people now singing in Palestine to something that we more traditionally take to be archival, really thinking about the internet also as this kind of amnesiac archive.

[00:26:47.807] - **Basel Abbas**
And just to add that we're also really— we're inspired by people's practice and people's struggle, and so witnessing or growing up during the sort of 2011 uprisings in Tunis and in Egypt, where there was a sort of active rupture of the image of the state being sort of— the image of the state was being ruptured through this sort of archival practice, you could say. People were filming these things and they were very important for them to upload it online so that there was a sort of image of the state that was being ruptured by the protesters that brought more people into the street, essentially, right? So it was

very active— and we sort of were thinking a lot those days about how the activists as archivists had replaced the artists as archivists. Or not replaced, but like they were using the same sort of thinking. So I think we're also sort of inspired by that, and then we're also really, we're really sort of informed by Aaron Swartz and the *Guerrilla Open Access Manifesto*, and the sort of dissemination and who has access right to knowledge and who has access to knowledge and how can your practice become, activate certain bodies of knowledge and make them accessible to certain people that don't have access otherwise.

[00:28:38.520] - **Basel Abbas**
So we're constantly thinking about these things and trying to have our practice expand into those areas.

[00:28:46.660] - **Katherine C. M. Adams**
Thank you for the question. Did anyone else want to pose a question?

[00:28:50.770] - **[Unknown speaker 2]**
Yeah, thank you so much for the answer. I was also wondering about text and your usage of text. I think in the project The Incidental Insurgents, that you used a lot of snippets of text and poetry. So I know that you try to navigate this nonlinear form of, I don't know how to explain it, expression, but sometimes text can be rigid or limiting or it might force you into linearity, so how do you interact with text in that sense?

[00:29:25.230] - **Ruanne Abou-Rahme**
I don't know, I don't feel like text is rigid, I mean I feel like it's so malleable. To go back to that project--we work a lot with sampling, the idea of sampling, so Basel comes from a very strong music practice, and part of the way that we work with text is to really take fragments and then build a kind of new script from them, and really allow different kind of voices and positions to kind of mutate and shape-shift into each other, and with that

work, we were really interested in the figure of the bandit, that's how it began. We were trying to speak about what we were experiencing, in the sense that many of the revolutions that we had been invested in had seemingly failed in one way or another, and so we were really thinking about what happens to people after that kind of failure, and we were reading the memoirs of Victor Serge. And in it, he was talking about his early days as an anarchist and sort of his disillusionment with that whole movement, and it really spoke a lot to the conditions and what we were thinking about and feeling then, and that was incredibly powerful to think about how there is an impulse to resist the conditions that we were in that keeps returning in different forms, to really think about how that impulse returns across spaces and times, and to really think about how we could use that, use these texts to speak about the present conditions.

[00:31:41.000] - **Ruanne Abou-Rahme**
And, when we first showed that work, we showed it in Jerusalem, we had actual political prisoners come and see the work and really be moved by the text and have no idea that actually it was written by Victor Serge. I mean, it really spoke to them, so that's what's interesting to us, right? How is it that this impulse keeps returning in different times and spaces, and how can we think about that resonance?

[00:32:13.900] - **[Unknown speaker 3]**
Thank you for the talk. Can we go back to [the] Avatar? I'm curious, maybe you could talk a bit more about how you ended up with the idea of making protesters more anonymous and end up with this one character which represents, try to represent them. And I find it a bit hard to understand, like, in which way do we need to see protesters more anonymous and why? In which way should we see the protesters more anonymously? Why do we need that? And how did you contextualize this character to talk about them?

[00:33:07.410] - **Ruanne Abou-Rahme**

I think the anonymity was about another point that he was making, but this was because we were not able to reach Gaza, and the protesters there were not able to reach us, so creating the avatars that we then we are activating, that are also composite of us, was a way to try to rupture that physical impossibility of us reaching them and them reaching us. And I think that was a very important point for us: like if the physical conditions are impossible, then how can we think about another sort of virtual space? It wasn't about becoming anonymous, and it's not like a representation, it's actually trying to move away from a representation. But you'd have to see the work and the text which speaks to, you know,--it also uses text by Edward Said to think about— what does it mean to be a people who are told that they don't exist. So it really delves into the more— not just the material impossibilities of that condition, but the psychological sort of duress that you come into when you're constantly told that your physical being is an impossibility, in a sense.

[00:34:44.740] - **Basel Abbas**
And it's not one character but multiple characters that appear in the video, and it's thinking about it more existentially, you know?

[00:34:53.290] - **[Unknown speaker 4]**
I'm obviously interested in your work for one hundred reasons, but one of them is the way you think or use the audience or reflect about the audience in your work, both in terms of form and content. So in terms of form, you never just— it seems to me that you don't picture an audience just seated or passing by in a gallery. So I'd like you to think a little bit, is it early on in how you design this space you think about the audience and their presence in it? Do you wish that they activated in a different way or changed it. And in terms of content, obviously you function in different places. You create work inside Palestine, you create work here in New York and throughout the world, and you never fall into this, like, you know, settler colonialism for dummies or something. Like, you never water down your work politically or in terms of the content in general. So I'm just

curious about how you think about audiences.

[00:36:05.310] - **Ruanne Abou-Rahme**
I think actually most of the time we're primarily, we want to make sure that a Palestinian audience is going to be interested in the work.

[00:36:14.050] - **Basel Abbas**
They're the hardest audience.

[00:36:15.410] - **Ruanne Abou-Rahme**
We want to be starting to a point where we're speaking to— of course we're invested in many communities— but that's a very important community for us. So it's very significant for us that we're making work that is starting a conversation there. And that's why we end up like there is no Settler Colonialism for Dummies, because we're already coming into a certain set of like— we're also always trying to find ways that that speaks to other conditions. So also refusing a certain ghettoization of Palestine as it's like really trying to read the world from Palestine. And then, you know, in terms of the form, I think that it started very early on for us. Do you want to talk about that, or should I?

[00:37:09.880] - **Basel Abbas**
The spatial stuff?

[00:37:11.730] - **Ruanne Abou-Rahme**
I mean, even in terms of like when we first worked on sound.

[00:37:21.860] - **Basel Abbas**
There's a lot to say about that because I feel that when we first started working together, we were— we started with sound, we focused on sound only because we actually didn't know what to film because we were frustrated with like the image

representation coming out of Palestine and sort of we felt that like a certain kind of image that was coming out of Palestine had lost its potency, actually, because it was repeated so much that there was a level of potency of the situation that we were living and a sort of almost fatigue from that image. And so we decided to think about sound and think about how we could bring back this sort of potency through sound. And one of our first works, which we showed in Beirut first actually, we spent about six, seven months recording by secret on a checkpoint, Qalandia checkpoint between Ramallah and Jerusalem. And we just started recording and listening to the sound, and part of what we sort of were very striking was how normalized the checkpoint was for Palestinians. This specific checkpoint, well there is much to say, but this specific checkpoint, they were already at the height of like sort of putting more technology in the checkpoint.

[00:38:57.590] - **Basel Abbas**
So you were not seeing the soldiers anymore, you were just hearing their voices. So they were on these towers and they were giving you commands and rather than having this sort of old-school turnstile, you started to have more motorized and digital sort of turnstiles. So there began this sort of— and that's where we were recording. And so you have to imagine that you don't see the soldier, you hear their voice, they're yelling at you, they're giving you directions. And then you have Palestinians policing each other. Because they want to get through. And so the sort of— we wanted to sort of think about how to denormalize that space, basically not to recreate the checkpoint. So though the sound was— we didn't want to play it back and recreate it, we wanted to think about denormalizing it. So we started looping and fragmenting and taking out all these frequencies that were hidden, let's say, but very obvious when you repeat them, so this violence was sort of coming out through the sound. And I think that really like helped us, that project really helped us think about how you sort of denormalize again, or sort of shake things, and it really informed the rest of our practice to think about also things like how you can separate this sort of "how can you separate the sort of art

object from the viewer".

[00:40:26.410] - **Basel Abbas**
Because again, in that project we also started to think about how at a checkpoint you have to separate your mind from your body to make it to the other side. And so, and you don't think about it, you just subconsciously separate your mind from your body in a way to make it to the other side, because otherwise there'd be friction and problems, and it's just not a normal thing that a normal human being can withstand. And so we started to think about the spatial components of everything and how you rupture that sort of the art object, the viewer, and then how are you like, you don't have to like it, and a lot of people are very bothered by our installations, but they can't avoid it, they can't just like passively sort of look at it. You have no choice, You're either in or you're out, and that's the kind of thinking behind the spell. Did I answer?

[00:41:19.280] - **Ruanne Abou-Rahme**
I think it's about also implicating people in the work, and usually when we have our video and sound installations, very often you could be in the projections or come into the projections. There's a certain kind of materiality that it takes, the sonic frequencies also really end up somehow kind of like your body becomes a resonator in a way. So it is very much for us trying to sort of implicate people that come into the work and think about what happens with that implication. It could go in many different directions. So I think that's very, you know, we always want people to kind of move around and to, you know, sometimes when we have the multiple screens as well, the way in which you—where you look really changes what is it that you even experience, what is your reading of the work shifts. So there is this sense that people coming in are also very involved in composing a particular reading of the work.

[00:42:25.550] - **Katherine C. M. Adams**
Yeah, thank you so much for the question.

[00:42:27.850] - **Ruanne Abou-Rahme**
A good question.

[00:42:28.680] - **Katherine C. M. Adams**
We have time for maybe one more question. One or two last questions. I think I saw the hand in the back before.

[00:42:36.110] - **[Unknown speaker 5]**
I was just wondering if there are certain spaces or moments that you are more attracted to in terms of what you want to portray or things that stand out to you or you look for.

[00:42:49.680] - **Ruanne Abou-Rahme**
You mean when we're exhibiting?

[00:42:51.470] - **[Unknown speaker 5]**
Just in your practice of creating.

[00:42:55.900] - **Ruanne Abou-Rahme**
We're very impacted by people's practices. I think a lot of what moves us is the different ways in which people under the kind of very difficult conditions that we find ourselves in the world are trying to generate different possibilities of, again, like not just surviving the moment, but really, you know, creating an opening, even if it's like a momentary sort of event. I think these are most of the things, and then the land and all these kinds of non-human beings and the way in which they also tell a very important narrative of resistance for us is very, very significant and very impactful.

[00:43:55.410] - **Basel Abbas**

I'm passionate about people's practices rather than art. I wake up in the morning and the first thing I do is check the news and I check the thing and I care about what's happening with people and their practices. And that's really what motivates me from day to day. I used to think it was art, but actually it's not. My drive is something else, and the art sort of helps me work through that stuff.

[00:44:22.820] - **Katherine C. M. Adams**
Thank you. And I think we can take one more question if you want.

[00:44:30.200] - **[Unknown speaker 5]**
I just want to ask you about this image. It's, I think, from an installation that was recently exhibited in MoMA. And this kind of statement "we are in the negative, we are in the negative makers", which is, I think, in the installation itself, or maybe other recent works by you, that I believe is not in the limit of like statement, of textual statement. Something goes [beyond]— how you play, your construction, the artistic form of how you play with the actual politics of the installation itself. And from working with images that are produced by power institutions, maybe for surveillance, our media, whatever. But also for example, the wall that is exhibited with [the videos], which is more sculptural, architectural, has different texture. So my question of like how you reach this kind of decisions, of these kind of tensions between images and sound text that takes this statement to the very artistic form of the work itself, because it's not only a paper text from the curatorial statement or text that put an image to say we are negative, but it's actually— and it's not [only] the negation of a certain power, but the negation of as Dina was saying about a certain ideological meaning of archive as data, or even that this works has something very witnessing, very disdefined, but not in the evidential tradition.

[00:46:34.520] - **[Unknown speaker 5]**

It's also a negation of that.

[00:46:38.740] - **Ruanne Abou-Rahme**
Sure.

[00:46:39.370] - **[Unknown speaker 5]**
I'm very curious to know how you reach this in your practice, to this kind of to make this, to construct this politics of installation, images, sound, and text, to actually make a negative piece, not only a negative statement.

[00:46:57.820] - **Ruanne Abou-Rahme**
But then the negative is not negative, right, as you experienced in that work.

[00:47:03.800] - **Basel Abbas**
Degenerative negative.

[00:47:05.000] - **Ruanne Abou-Rahme**
It's embracing being in the negative, in the thing that's broken and also refusing to constantly prove otherwise. This is a very good question and a very big one. There could be a whole talk just about this question that you've just asked. There's so much to say, I don't even know where to begin. I think in terms of the text, that's why it's so hard when you just have one still image, right? The text is really like a moving body in the work, and it's full of a kind of multiplicity. It's not one thing that's like static; it has this kind of multiplicity, it has something that's kind of very porous in it. And the way that we think about how sound and image and text come together. There's so many things to say, but one thing I could talk about is [that] in Palestine, you reach literal limits, literal limits to your visible horizon where you arrive at a wall and you literally can't—and it feels like a sci-fi film because you literally cannot see past that point. And so something in your imaginary also becomes very occupied. It's not just that the physical space is occupied,

but your ability to imagine and to see is occupied.

[00:48:58.300] - **Ruanne Abou-Rahme**
And in that way, sound became very significant for us because sound can seep. It's really hard to contain sound. Sound is far more porous. Sound can contaminate in the way that the visual fields can't always do. So when we start working on a project, we very often start from text that we're writing or a sample from different places, and then we create the sound in relation to that text; it's in conversation actually with the text rather than with the image. And then the images come later and are very much impacted by the sound and the text. And we're working a lot with the idea of rhythm as also like a resistant potential. Really thinking about sound and rhythm as things that cannot be contained, something that cannot be quite killed, something that can't be crushed. Rhythm is a space for us that's, I would say, really significant in also our political thinking. And then in terms of— I'm just going to go very quickly because there's a lot that we could say about everything, but like in terms of the— how we then think spatially about the work and the way that we work with the panels is also to resist a certain gaze that thinks that perhaps we can understand everything from one single image.

[00:50:51.630] - **Ruanne Abou-Rahme**
So it's about rupturing that gaze, making it actually quite impossible to take in and see everything because it's resisting all the kind of representations of anyone that's dispossessed is pretty much fed up with the regime of representation. In a way, we started to work with the panels to fragment and to fracture the images even more, and to within that also, again, like how do we use the negative as a site of potential? How do we use the fracture as a site of potential to open up a kind of multiplicity as well that we think is really important, and to kind of resist this idea that you can capture the work, or capture the content, and do like a very smooth reading of what it is. It's always resisting or evading that capture. So I think that's just a very short— we'll talk afterwards,

but there's much more to say about that.

[00:51:48.860] - **Basel Abbas**
I'll just add that we're also constantly thinking in terms of capture, in terms of the art, when you work on institutions that are also able to co-opt, you have to sort of in the form itself also not allow this co-optation to happen. And so you embrace the negative formally as well as a sort of— if everyone loves the work, it's a problem, basically. If it's too smooth and it's too thin and people from all walks of life and everyone just loves it, then there's a big problem. So that's kind of formally as well, not just conceptually, obviously driven to a political conceptual line, but formally as well, we think about that. And so nothing is ever really smooth, even. And I think that came with time, like the realization that that's what we're doing, even though we've been doing it for a while. So even the sort of evading capture through sound, like a melody emerges but it never really comes through, and the body almost fills in the melody themselves. There's a melody appearing, but it's always disappearing as well, like orally, let's say, sound-wise. And then that sort of follows through in everything else.

[00:53:22.090] - **Basel Abbas**
Yeah, just add that. But there's so much to say.

[00:53:24.280] - **Ruanne Abou-Rahme**
A good question.

[00:53:24.990] - **Basel Abbas**
We can talk a lot about this.

[00:53:26.700] - **Katherine C. M. Adams**
Yeah, thank you so much for that question. And thank you so much, Basel and Ruanne

for joining us, for your attention. And this has been great. I hope you all enjoyed the rest of the exhibitions today.

[00:53:38.550] - **Ruanne Abou-Rahme**
Thank you.

[00:53:38.890] - **Basel Abbas**
Thank you.