

Works from the Barjeel Art Foundation collection come to CCS Bard

No to the Invasion: Breakdowns and Side Effects spans over two decades of art from Arab countries

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The Sharjah-based Barjeel Art Foundation and the Bard College Center for Curatorial Studies in New York (CCS) have collaborated to assemble an exhibition of works that deal with cultural and socio-political issues in the Arabic-speaking world. Titled No to the Invasion: Breakdowns and Side Effects (until 29 October), and organised by the curator Fawz Kabra, the show includes 25 sculptures, photographs, videos and installations drawn from the foundation that span more than two decades. More 20 artists, including Kader Attia, Mona Hatoum and Yto Barrada, are included.

The show, which is titled after a poster by the Kuwait-born artist Thuraya Al-Baqsamī made shortly after the start of the Iraq-Kuwait war, includes biographical and art historical information that “allows the viewer to explore further trajectories, either through artists and works, or through broader aesthetic, historical, social or political themes”, says Mandy Merzaban, the founding curator of the foundation.



Plan for a Greater Baghdad by Ala Younis. Photo: Alessandra Chemollo and courtesy la Biennale di Venezia.

One highlight is an installation by the Kuwait-born artist Ala Younis called *Plan for a Great Baghdad* (2015) that was shown at the 56th Venice Biennale in 2015. The work features a series of 35mm slides by the architect Rifat Chadirj from 1982 that show the proposal for a gymnasium named after Saddam Hussein and designed by Le Corbusier, which was in the making for 25 years before it was inaugurated in 1980. Younis “develops a research project that explores the role of power in architecture and the building of monuments, bringing to light forgotten histories and infusing her subjective experience as part of her research”, says Merzaban.

Another notable installation is *Mixed Water, Lebanon, Israel* (2013) by the conceptual Beirut and Paris-based artist Charbel-joseph Boutros, which includes drawn maps of Lebanon and Palestine with a glass of water in between that contains mineral water from both

locations. Over the duration of the show, the water will evaporate, “adding an almost mystical quality to the work, where political tensions and points of origin diffuse and dissolve through an inescapable natural process”, says Merzaban.



Untitled I + II (2008) by Kareem Lofty. Photo courtesy of the Barjeel Art Foundation.

Karim Sultan, the director of the foundation, says: “given that contemporary Arab art is still unfamiliar to many in the United States, a student and faculty audience is an incredibly important one, which allows for a unique point of engagement with a receptive public.” Earlier this year, the foundation partnered with the Yale University Art Gallery in New Haven to show a collection of Modern art from the Middle East, and will co-organise an exhibition of Modern and contemporary Arab works at the American University Museum in Washington, D.C., in September.