

Basel Abbas and Ruanne Abou-Rahme: May amnesia never kiss us on the mouth

The Common Guild, Glasgow
9 September to 9 October

A three-sided square of thin wooden screens of different shapes and sizes engulfs the viewer at 5 Florence Street, a former school building which is home to Common Guild for Basel Abbas and Ruanne Abou-Rahme's *May amnesia never kiss us on the mouth*.

The footage, mostly in photonegative, shows crowds dancing in the street, performers moving singly or in pairs, dashcam-style views of roads winding through desert and valley, and occasional violent encounters between civilians and government forces. A beat-speckled wash fills the space, punctuated by vocal refrains, and a fragmentary written narrative plays out in Arabic and English across the wall of projections: 'we are in the negative, unbound', reads one snippet, giving some context to the inverted colour scheme. The cumulative effect is weighty, to be experienced with the whole body.

This is the most recent iteration of a project started in 2012 by New York and Ramallah-based artists Abbas and Abou-Rahme, when they began collecting DIY footage – mostly from mobile phones and other digital devices – of everyday life across various countries in the Middle East, including Palestine, Iran, Yemen, Egypt and Syria. The emphasis was on capturing organic and spontaneous moments of performance, in particular public dancing and singing. Initially, the spur was to document experiences of the Arab Spring, but the material has outgrown that context, taking in various scenes of political strife from the Syrian and Yemeni civil wars to land seizures in Palestine – the focus of the current show, subtitled 'only sounds that tremble through us'. The archive has been used as the basis for new performances developed with musicians and a dancer, responding to specific music, texts and bodily gestures in the original footage. The artists' statements on the work suggest an attempt to counter a western proclivity to media images of suffering and destruction from the areas in question, a tendency that reinforces white geopolitical binaries of order and disorder. Dance and gesture become (according to their text at mayamnesia.diaart.org) 'a political act of embodiment ... in a moment marked by various forms of violence against entire living fabrics'. Bearing this motive in mind, it is worth emphasising the equally pervasive tone of mourning in this version of the show, expressing its specific focus on Palestinian apartheid. While the found footage may abound in spontaneity and catharsis, the commissioned dance routines have a repetitive quality and, at times, a physical tortuousness to them suggesting the processing of grief. Other footage shows the destruction of property by diggers and angry clashes between citizens and riot police. All this is enfolded by long, doleful shots of night-time roads: the balance of imagery should counteract any inference of a glibly positive message.

That said, the textual element emphasises resilience in a way that feeds the visuals, combining aphoristic statements – 'those who chant do not die' – with snatches of narrative suggestive of personal testimony: '5am Palestine, Jalmud in the dark looks out'; 'Haykal



Basel Abbas and Ruanne Abou-Rahme,
*May amnesia never kiss us on the mouth: Only sounds
that tremble through us, 2022, installation view*

whispers words, his own, not his own ... in a refugee camp in Jordan'. One implication is that, through dance and song, through joy taken in the bare fact of one's bodily existence, communities facing colonial and state violence can express an ineradicable kernel of political resistance. This carries within not only hope for the future but also meaningful remembrance of the dead.

That said, it's worth remphasising that various different versions of this artwork exist. Originally commissioned by the Museum of Modern Art and DIA Art Foundation, New York, a version of *May Amnesia* has been shown at MoMA earlier this year, and another was recently presented at Zurich's Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst. An interactive online version can be accessed on DIA's website. The language of the current presentation, with its implications of a clearly identifiable oppressor and oppressed – 'we talk about ourselves as mutating ... knowing that in mutation, in contamination, in the negative is where they come undone' – is presumably nuanced in the different versions that span a range of geopolitical contexts.

It is also worth acknowledging the impact of the multiscreen format, which means that bodily position and movement around the gallery alters the range of text and image encountered, giving a different narrative tone and sense of immersion to each viewer. While the gesture is a familiar one, it implies attentiveness to the diversity of individual stories, sensations and emotions captured, which span large swathes of space and time. Such nuancing gestures seem almost as vital as Abbas and Abou-Rahme's desire to confront us with the lived realities of communities too often made invisible.

Greg Thomas is a critic and editor based in Glasgow.

Temporary Atlas: Mapping the Self in the Art of Today

Oriel Mostyn, Llandudno, 25 June to 25 September

'The territory no longer precedes the map, nor survives it,' wrote Jean Baudrillard in 1983. 'Henceforth, it is the map that precedes the territory.' The definition of mapping and its uses have expanded in the past half-century well beyond the topographical. Maps are now used to analyse, organise and visualise abstract intellectual spaces, and it is this broad concept of mapping that the exhibition, according to its curator, Alfredo Cramerotti, seeks to represent.

The 17-artist show is 'an organic product of the years of the pandemic', and so, perhaps not surprisingly, the body is a point of departure or destination for much of the work on show. Adéolá Dewis's towering painted and