



ARTIST

Dena Al-Adeeb; Sama Alshaibi

TITLE

Efface/Remain, from the series 'Baghdadi Mem/Wars'

DATE

2010

DIMENSIONS

15 in H x 44 in W

MEDIUM

Inkjet Prints

IMAGE NOTES

sheet 16 x 44"

CATALOGUE NUMBER

2010.106

CURRENT LOCATION

Warehouse

DENA AL-ADEEB

BORN

1974

BIRTHPLACE

Basra, Iraq

GENDER

Female

CITIZENSHIP

United States

CULTURAL HERITAGE

American-Iraqi

LIGHT WORK RELATIONSHIP

Artist-in-Residence, 2010

LIGHT WORK PUBLICATIONS

Contact Sheet 162

BIOGRAPHY

For a more recent CV or bio please visit the artist's website, <http://www.denaaladeeb.com>

Dena Al-Adeeb was born in Baghdad, Iraq. Deported out of Iraq just before the Iraq/Iran War in 1980, she and her family escaped to Kuwait until the beginning of the 1991 Gulf War, when she was forced to relocate to San Francisco, California. Dena left the United States in 2003 when she spent time in several places (Mexico, Cuba, Spain, U.A.E, Jordon, Iraq) before moving to Egypt for four years. She returned to the US in 2008 and is currently residing between San Francisco and Los Angeles, California. She received her M.A. in Anthropology-Sociology, Visual and Cultural Anthropology at the American University of Cairo. She received her B.A. in International

Relations, Middle East and North Africa from San Francisco State University. Her work has been presented in New York, San Francisco, Oakland, Michigan, Sweden, Cairo and at the Orebro International Videoart Festival, Falaki Gallery, Mashrabia Gallery, Karim Francis Gallery, National Arab American Museum, SomArts Gallery, and Pro-Arts Gallery, among other venues.

ESSAYS

Baghdad Mem/Wars, a collaborative project by artists Sama Alshaibi and Dena Al-Adeeb, addresses emotional and intellectual concerns surrounding the wars in Iraq and ensuing historical displacements. The series, realized in photography and video, is comprised of three distinct suites that blur the line between art and activism. Alshaibi's and Al-Adeeb's reenactments of the personal signify collective narratives and shared moments. As the artists speak of parallels between their two experiences of leaving Iraq during the Iraq/Iran war, many viewers will inevitably share their memories. (I am, in fact, reminded of my own emotions during that period.) More importantly, the artists deny viewers their comfort zone, forcing all who watch to reconsider political and cultural decisions or otherwise accept complacency. Baghdad Mem/Wars also explores gender and social issues beyond the wars in Iraq. The two women characters who appear in the videos speak to a multitude of historical and current migratory experiences; personification of wars, loss, and dislocation; while also of melancholia, and at times loss of hope. However, the sheer dynamism of the artists' performances as well as the rhythmic repetition throughout the work counter these feelings and signal hope and perseverance. While their abstract representation of displacement and the neutrality of their spatial constructions signify the universality of the experience, identity subtly permeates the work through various props, including dress and text. The notion of fragmentation (of memory, existence, and experience) to the point of disintegration is very strong in Baghdad Mem/Wars. The three desperate yet related moments chosen for the suites, as well as the duality present in their titles, heightens this feeling of fragmentation. Through the vibrancy of their performances, Alshaibi and Al-Adeeb force these dual spaces and concepts to merge. In Still/Chaos, two iconic figures dressed in black, yet strategically without veils, evoke images of pre-Islamic ritual mourning when women deliberately uncovered their heads and let their hair loose. The artists perform a choreographed dance of agony, where the contrast between their black dresses and white nondescript environment intensifies the tension. The two women are trapped in the same space yet appear isolated; they occasionally touch but never face each other or the viewer. They share and negotiate the dislocation but do not seem to be capable of comforting each other. Alshaibi and Al-Adeeb evoke the poetry of Iraqi icon Nazik al-Malaika in Efface/Remain. The inclusion of al-Malaika, a female poet, further emphasizes the femininity of the project and signifies a happier, more optimistic age. The artists' choice of poem, The Strangers, and the words that are most visible in the video—"the hours have passed"—reference the perceived current cultural amnesia and erasure. While the act of writing attempts to record history, the repetition of the few chosen words over and over signifies an obsessive need to remember or perhaps to cover up a memory rather forgotten. In Islamic ornamentation, repetition mediates harmony and contemplation of the unknown. In Efface/Remain, however, it conveys a sense of foreboding urgency. The superimposed yellow color the artists introduce appears to replicate at first what is written in white chalk, but it quickly begins to reference hiding and forced erasure, thus requiring the act of starting over in perpetuity. In Absence/Presence, the constantly changing horizon line pulls the viewer into the scene as it moves closer and slants, confusing the past and present. A woman (Al-Adeeb) wanders back and forth, alternately disappearing into the horizon and out of the frame, but perpetually coming closer to the viewer. The appearance of Alshaibi to reenact a specific memory (the throwing of water behind Al-Adeeb, which is a cultural superstition performed when loved ones leave wishing them good luck and safe return) implies both absence and the hope of return. The women are dressed in contrasting colors further signifying the binary and duality of the act. Throughout all three suites of Baghdad Mem/Wars, Alshaibi and Al-Adeeb perform the psychological aspect of dislocation by visualizing and reenacting experiences made distant now by time and geography. Through movements and imagery, they create abstract representations of traumatic visual memories that echo their feelings and position them at once as both victims and witnesses. Ultimately, Baghdad Mem/Wars reflects on the inexplicable trauma of an entire nation as it comes to terms with the aftermath of war rather than turning away. Nada Shabout Sama Alshaibi and Dena Al-Adeeb were Light Work Artists-in-Residence in January 2010. For more information on Alshaibi, visit her website at www.samaalshaibi.com; for more information on Al-Adeeb, visit www.denaaladeeb.com. Nada Shabout is an associate professor of art history and the director of the Contemporary Arab and Muslim Cultural Studies Institute (CAMCSI) at the University of North Texas in Denton, TX. She is also the president of the Association of Modern and Contemporary Art of the Arab World, Iran, and Turkey (AMCA).