

.sight.
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FADO Performance Art Centre

Established in 1993, FADO Performance Art Centre is a not-for-profit artist-run centre for performance art based in Toronto, Canada. FADO exists to provide a stable, ongoing, supportive forum for creating and presenting performance art. Currently, we are the only artist-run centre in English Canada devoted specifically to this form. We present the work of local, national and international artists who have chosen performance art as a primary medium to create and communicate provocative new images and new perspectives.

www.performanceart.ca

Xpace Cultural Centre

Xpace Cultural Centre is a membership driven artist-run centre supported by the OCAD Student Union dedicated to providing emerging and student artists with the opportunity to showcase their work in a professional setting. Xspace's focus on contemporary practices reflects the interests and needs of its membership. Xspace's short programming timelines allows the centre to respond to contemporary issues in theory and aesthetics, keeping up to the minute with what is going on directly in the community.

www.xpace.info

LISA KISS DESIGN

2013 EMERGING ARTISTS SERIES
presented by FADO Performance Art Centre

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Curated by Francisco-Fernando Granados

March 8 to 30, 2013
Xpace Cultural Centre
2-303 Lansdowne Avenue, Toronto

ARTISTS

Basil AlZeri
Golboo Amani
Cressida Kocienski
Maryam Taghavi

Co-presented by Xpace Cultural Centre

Emerging Artist Series

Initiated in 2002 by Tanya Mars, FADO's Emerging Artists Series was created to provide an on-going professional venue for emerging artists from Toronto and beyond to develop and present a performance piece, working within a curatorial framework set out by an emerging curator. FADO's intention with this series is to nurture new work and ideas, provide direction and mentorship to both the artists and the curator, and to showcase the work of the city's newest perspectives in performance art.



INTRODUCTION

The Elliptical is Ethical

Ricky Varghese

What is coded in the ambivalent structure of the elliptical, or more specifically, what possibly provocative secrets do the ellipsis promise to contain or hold? What is the surreptitious nature of both the figure and ground that, simultaneously, prescribes and proscribes an elliptical way of thinking about sight and visibility, site and the specificity of space, and, perhaps and even more immediately, the particular modes of operation embedded in the cumbersome curatorial task of citation, as such, flanked in that liminal space between sight and site? Put simply, where might we locate the ethical in the ellipsis, or in the aesthetic and linguistic category that the ellipsis appears to implicitly signify, as evocative of the seen and the unseen in the visual scene, the obscene in the political realm, evocative of an absent presence, a visible invisibility, and an empty fullness in the social world of the everyday? The answers to these inquiries might be both suggestive of a link that enables us to tie sight to site-specificity as such, but might be radically and critically significant in trying to locate the ethical as always already residing alongside the practice of the aesthetic.

When we think of the grammar of the ellipsis, like the clandestine promise inscribed in a footnote, that 'negligible wasteland of the text to which its most intimate secrets are banished' (Rebecca Comay, *Mourning Sickness*, 2011, p 28), as a kind of structural disembodiment and denaturing of language itself—its very cached fault lines and caesuras laid bare for all to see and yet for none to take notice of—the architectural configuration of the ruin comes to mind. The ruin—in its state of incommensurable decay and deterioration—marks and demarcates the aforementioned absent presence, a visibility that is as well simultaneously an invisibility, and an emptiness that at once is both the stigmata of a history of traumatic loss and the ruptured memory of remembered pasts. It signals in its very state or stasis of abstraction both the insistent impulse toward the ethical and an imperative that always already

commands the direction of the aesthetic in how we choose to look at the social world based on that very sense of the ethical. Regarding this abstraction and the making of the abstract in the task of the optical as it is engaged with in aesthetic practice—in how we look at, or rather choose to look at the object of the ruin or the ellipsis to seek out from within its absences the traces of loss—we discover both a gesture of recuperative presentation and re-presentation and the very language of poesis that might promise to privilege the ethical in the always already political act of looking. In the final analysis, as is in the case of the ruin, could we not suggest that the grammar of the elliptical, the absent presence embedded in the very structure of the ellipsis, is, at its heart, governed by a task of looking for something that is not either there to be discovered at first glance, or something that has to be conceived of through the practice of citation that ties together sight and site in the aesthetic realm?

Here, a distinction seems important to relay—the differentiation of the task of the look, or looking, as an optical experience as opposed to simply a visual one in the realm of aesthetic practice. This delineation and distinction between optics, or the optical, and the nature of the visual is paramount to understanding how the look or looking, as an ethical imperative, figures into, within, and structures the tenuous relationship between aesthetic practice and such exercises of the gravest political import as remembrance and forgetting. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines optics as ‘the science that deals with the genesis and propagation of light, the changes that it undergoes and produces, and other phenomena closely associated with it’ (2012). In what might be further understood as, to an extent, distinct from the optical, it describes the visual as ‘of, relating to, or used in vision’ or ‘attained or maintained by sight’ (2012). Optics or the optical do not have to pertain to the structure of what can or cannot be seen; it, as in the case of the look theorized here, goes beyond sight, see-ability, and even the limits of the visual field as prescribed by a site and how it could be cited.

As such, one might garner that the difference between the optical and the visual is one where while the visual might indicate, to an extent, an at-times abilist rendering of seeing and see-ability, giving itself over to the primacy of what can be laid to sight—what can, may, or might be seen or not, as the case may be—the optical and optics, in general, address a psychical experience of looking for something that may not be seen at first glance or not at all, and may not even be a scene, in the visual sense; in this sense, it might resemble the task of an archeologist excavating a dig at a ruin site, searching for that which s/he does not already know, or a translator for whom language becomes the site of linguistic ruination, the task and space that accommodates the elliptical in the name of a destruction of the old and the construction of the new. The optical, as such, as in the case of the enigmatic nature of the ethical look that the aesthetic commands from the depths of the limits of its own ability to present and re-present the world, is the very structure of play that governs light and dark; it, as such, sees in itself the structure of an interminable loss itself, in the looking at of that which might not be visible—the aforementioned loss inscribed in the structure of the ellipsis.

Such an ethics of loss, as in how we might come to consider the optical, might become the very governing force in how one looks—looks at the past, at history, at memory, at remembering and at forgetting, at the social, the political, and the aesthetic—because it seems to go beyond the visual tendency to see only what is visible. In a sense, it does not merely gaze at the ruins of time, memory, and/or historical consciousness, it tries to see meaning in the loss embedded in the disembodied structure of the ruin itself; it sees the uncanny familiarity between the life of the past and life in the present, and seeks to understand what lies beyond and beneath the fragile skin of subjective political trauma or of the horror that the ellipsis, the site of the unseen realm of the unconscious, chooses for the tentative purpose of inscription, sightedness and citation.

FROM THE CURATOR

.sight.specifc.

Francisco-Fernando Granados

consider sight as situation:

*the situation of its own contours in the discourse of the aesthetic;
the oversight of its privilege in relationship to the range of sense.*

consider site as a means of observation:

*the observation of space through and past the mono-scopic;
the insight of a careful tracing of the space between gazes.*

*consider how action, event, exchange,
intervention, happening,*

performance, presentation, process

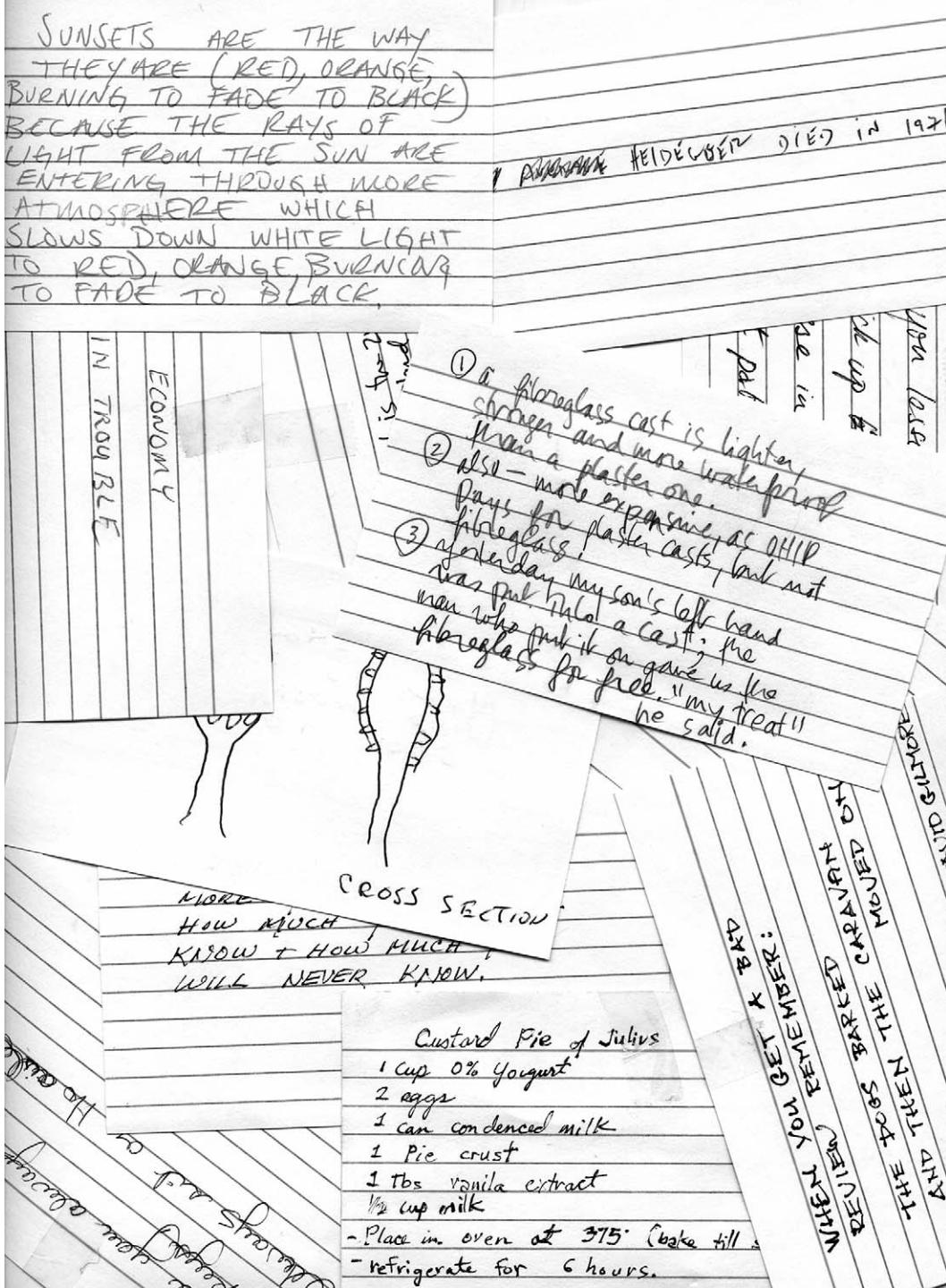
space out relationships of visibility in time and space

This action-based curatorial brief forms the armature for the 2013 FADO Emerging Artists Series. *.sight.specifc.* consists of commissioned live works by Basil AlZeri, Golboo Amani, Cressida Kocienski, and Maryam Taghavi. As part of the series, each work is a proposition in search of situated perspectives on the possibilities of performance art as a contextual practice that traces the embodied relationship between the optical and the spatial. The question then becomes: what are the coincidences between sight and site in the field of performance art? Sounding the same but contoured differently, what is the shape of their relationship? Each proposition draws together these two elements in a material and conceptual overlay that brings into focus questions of knowledge and memory, contact and distance, longing and belonging. The works position artists and audience in relationship to home and hospitality in real time through cyberspace, trading knowledge on the streets, tracing trans-planetary sight-lines, and staging variations on absurdity.

The process of curating performance is itself an open-ended endeavour, driven by the vertiginous interplay between observation and the unforeseeable. Having observed the work of each of the artists featured here, I have noticed that there is a line potentially capable of holding all these practices together for a brief moment, the occasion called an exhibition, and I have described it as such: sight specific. And yet, this thing I have noticed and attempted to name is mostly unforeseeable to me at this point. I arrive at the moment of writing able to do little more than to trace the negative space of the show by describing its framework. I can see its outlines, ready to be filled and stretched, likely even broken by the work. The framework is a concave site. I will arrive on the eve of each performance thinking I know something about sight specificity; after all, I have spent almost a year thinking about it, and almost as long working with the artists and the cultural institutions that will make this three-week-long event possible. False hope. This is performance, the answers are only in the action itself; the work is yet to happen.

But what happens in performance? In almost every other artistic medium, the moment of making the work is clearly distinguished from the moment of its presentation. In performance art, the moment of making the work is the moment of its presentation. Performance stages the making of what is being seen, as it shows that which cannot be made visible. It is the sight specific.

If you are reading this essay, the work may have already happened. The framework has been filled in an ephemeral rush that has recast its shape in ways I cannot know. If you have seen *sight specific*, you know more than I do now. If you have found this text after the series has ended, we are divided further in time. In a circumstantial swerve, we find ourselves in the same position, not knowing what the performances will be/were. In her lecture *The Double Bind of Translation*, Gayatri Chakravorti Spivak says 'tracing is repeating with a difference.' Like an ellipsis, the act of witnessing the work draws the space between you and I, reader and writer, tracing each end of





CRESSIDA KOCIENSKI

our immeasurable distance in time and space. For Spivak, a trace is not a sign, it promises nothing. Like a ruin, it is only an indication that there was something there before. I can say with certainty that this essay will become something that will be left by the performances. The text acts as both preamble and trace. The ellipsis in the text is the experience created by the action. As each performance takes place, its sense—its *aisthesis*, a sensible knowledge—gets away from the framework, rewriting anything I am able to sketch out here and limiting my ability to narrate. And yet, there is a responsibility to draw this line that the works will transform.

Retrace the question: what happens in the performances?

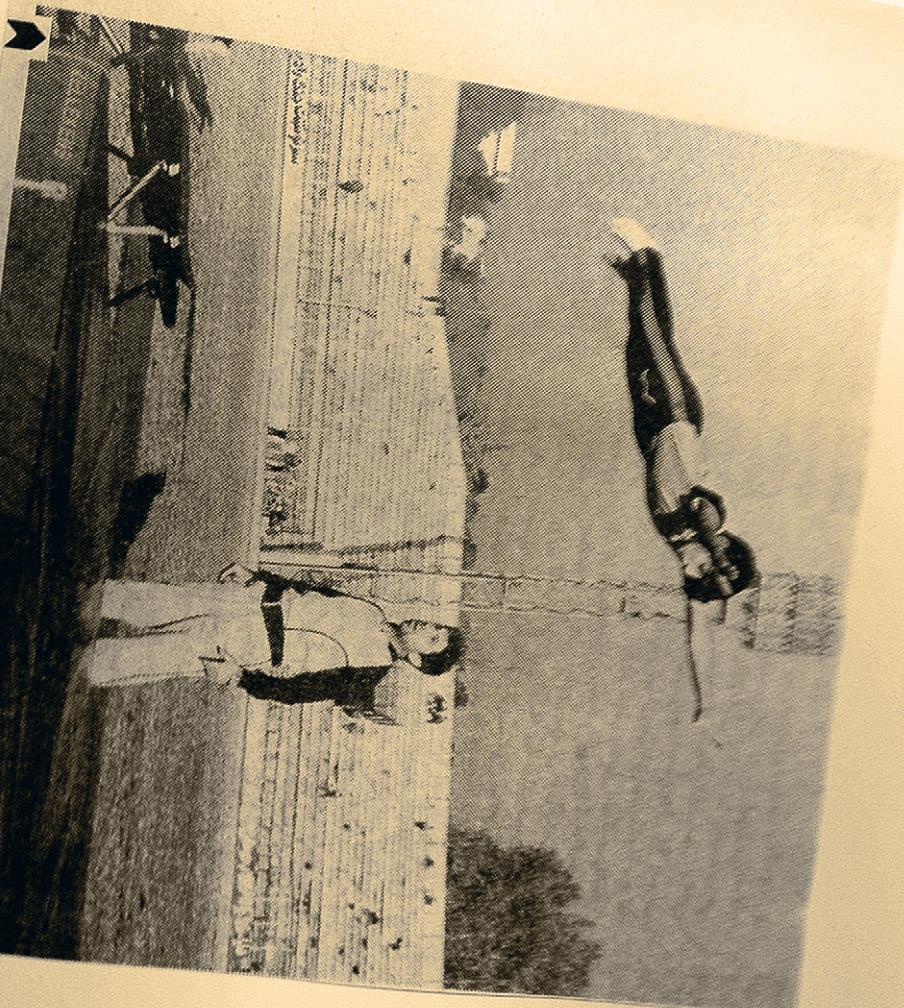
A sight specific engagement with the figure of the narrator entails a telling of the double bind of its position of privilege, a staging of its fragmentation. In Cressida Kocienski's *Planetaria*, this figure is situated through the specificity of the voice. Kocienski's performance lecture narrates the space of the McLaughlin Planetarium in downtown Toronto through a hybrid character: half woman, half meteorite. A burning chunk of intergalactic rock lodges in her throat, dividing her voice. The piece uses text-based live action and electronic elements to give an elliptical account of the meteor's passage from a distant object of observation to an observer returning the gaze at outer space. The telling of this trajectory provides a critical perspective on humanity's attempt at looking for an absolute other as an object of knowledge. The artist embodies a woman-meteor metaphor that speaks of constellations and the ways in which their naming follows the history of European domination. The story takes on the shape of politicized inter-planetary sight lines. Kocienski reshapes the contours of narrative itself to trace a fictional cosmic architecture that re-imagines the undue privilege and the burden placed on sight in a Greco-Roman tradition that became the template for the imagination of the crumbling 'Western' worldview. *Planetaria* assumes the privilege of the narrator while staging its fragmentation through the

creation of a hybrid, peripatetic voice. Here, sight specificity is embodied through an emphasis on sound, bringing into view the imagined space of a migrating body.

The sight specificity of a migrating body poses the question of how to situate home in a state of exile. Basil AlZeri's *T.M.K.L. Presents: beit Suad* activates the space of the kitchen as a means to maintain the possibility of a continuous Palestinian home-space in the face of various kinds of systematized violence. *T.M.K.L.* (The Mobile Kitchen Lab) is a self-sustaining utilitarian sculpture able to provide a full cooked meal in any location through the artist's intervention. In the context of *.sight.specif.*, the project launches with a cooking performance guided by AlZeri's mother, Suad, via Skype from either Jordan or the United Arab Emirates. For two days following the performance, the artist conducts a series of workshops where he teaches the public to cook the dishes his mother taught him how to make. Food becomes the medium for a staging of the trans-continental sight line between AlZeri and his mother. This exchange between mother and son becomes an act of generosity towards a public made up of friends, fellow artists and strangers in a gesture of collectivity-making. AlZeri extends the familiar sight line to the people that take part in the performance, feeding an incalculable 'us' and sharing the knowledge of a cultural practice that is essential to the survival of the Palestinian population. AlZeri's live archiving of these cultural practices materializes a home space where wisdom is recognized and honoured as matrilineal and performative.

The sight specific traces its family history to practices that challenge the entrenched patriarchal conventions that associate the power of white, cis-gendered masculinity with the singular point of view of the 'I' and the 'eye.' Golboo Amani's *The School of Bartered Knowledge* casts performance as a participatory public practice that re-structures the power relations of knowledge exchange. An institution at the edge of an institution, *The School*





of Bartered Knowledge is situated just outside the gallery space as an open-ended framework for the circulation of knowledge and information. Participants approach a structure that places them in an eye-to-eye, mind-to-mind encounter with the artist. This encounter shifts the logic of capital trade through an oral exchange of knowledge. The exchange itself remains ephemeral but the transaction enters the economy of the optical as it is recorded on index cards. Before final barter happens, Amani asks participants whether or not they feel the exchange is a fair trade. She only keeps the card if the participant believes it is indeed fair. The cards are then filed on shelves above the seating area of the structure, compiled as a loose-leaf encyclopaedia of the everyday. Amani also allows for the performance to continue when her body is not present in the structure, de-centring her role as the performer and exchanging it for that of a performer. Sight specificity here is a practice of making space for alternative pedagogical processes.

A continuous focus on process characterizes the sight specific. Maryam Taghavi's *Variations on Absurdity* focuses on the theatrical tropes of performance to highlight the gaps between artists and audience. Humble everyday objects loaded with often fraught cultural memories are wrapped, stacked, arranged, held, and dragged, broken and put back together in a progression that defies the syllogisms of reason. In a relentless repetition that consistently yields a new outcome, Taghavi presents the logic of the absurd, setting it centre stage. As objects are transformed through ritual and repetition, the ground of the performance extends out, touching the edges of the audience's space. Direct sight lines are diverted in a manner that suggests the enactment of a memory: perhaps a longing for belonging somewhere else. Taghavi's practice happens across two locations: Toronto and Tehran. What she presents takes place along the imaginary contour between these two points. *Variations on Absurdity* highlights the construction of the performance as an informal architecture that creates the possibility of inhabiting an expanded space, recalling artist Rebecca Belmore's assertion

that performance art is a means of claiming and re-claiming territory. The sight specific learns from histories of struggle and liberation, performing critically in an ever-changing context.

The four artists in *.sight.specifc.*, working live in the context of the 21st century, continue to build on the territories carved out, claimed and reclaimed by practices that have been a catalyst for the major shift in the understanding of sight from a predominantly colonizing Modernist retinal conception into an expanded range of sense that charges aesthetics with ethical and political possibilities. Feminist, Indigenous, post-colonial, queer and other radically progressive modes of cultural production that are part of broader movements for cultural and political change create the conditions of possibility for sight specificity. Caught in the act of expanding the aesthetic field, *.sight.specifc.* is dedicated to these artists.

MARCH 8 TO 30, 2013
Xspace Cultural Centre, 2-303 Lansdowne Avenue

Fridays & Saturdays in March | PERFORMANCE 2-6 PM FREE
The School of Bartered Knowledge by Golboo Amani

Friday March 8 | PERFORMANCE 8 PM \$10 / \$5 students
Planetaria by Cressida Kocienski

Friday March 15 | PERFORMANCE & DINNER 8 PM \$10 / \$5 students
T.M.K.L. Presents: beit Suad by Basil AlZeri
Co-presented by FUSE Magazine and Israeli Apartheid Week Toronto

Saturday & Sunday March 16-17 | WORKSHOP & LUNCH 1 PM FREE
T.M.K.L. Presents: beit Suad by Basil AlZeri

Friday March 22 | PERFORMANCE 8 PM \$10 / \$5 students
Variations on Absurdity by Maryam Taghavi

Thursday March 28 | OPENING & CLOSING PARTIES 7-11 PM FREE
OPENING *.sight.specifc.* exhibition of residue/ephemera
CLOSING Xspace exhibitions

Saturday March 30 | PANEL DISCUSSION 2 PM FREE
Viewing .sight.specifc.
Basil AlZeri, Golboo Amani, Cressida Kocienski & Maryam Taghavi
Moderated by Johanna Householder with Francisco-Fernando Granados

schedule

artists

BASIL ALZERI is an interdisciplinary, Toronto-based Palestinian artist working in performance, video, installation, food, and public art interventions/projects. His work is grounded in his practice as an art educator and community worker. His art is engaged with the intersection of everyday actions and life necessities. Given the context of a space, his work strives to interact with the public through gestures of generosity in social interactions and exchanges. AlZeri's performance work has been exhibited in Toronto (Nuit Blanche, Whipper Snapper Gallery), Québec (Fait Maison 14), Winnipeg (Central Canadian Centre for Performance), and Mexico (Transmuted International Performance Art Festival, Performancear O Morir).

basilalzeri.tumblr.com

GOLBOO AMANI is a Toronto-based interdisciplinary artist, who creates works focused on process and research through a variety of mediums including photography, performance, space intervention, digital media, and participatory practice. Concerned with the configurations of power embedded within institutional structures of knowledge production, Golboo's practice centers on pedagogical practices and artist-run counter culture. Through cross-disciplinary collaborative projects, the artist's recent bodies of work involve facilitating inclusive spaces of agency, organizing sites for generous skill sharing and embodied acts of reclamation.

golbooaamani.blogspot.ca

CRESSIDA KOCIENSKI holds an MFA in Art Writing from Goldsmiths, London. Working between video, performance, and text, her research concerns spatial production and modes of narration. She collaborates with architects Nishat Awan and Phil Langley as OPENkhana, and with Suzanne Harris-Brandts as O[S]R. She is the co-editor of the experimental publishing platform *The Institute of Immaterialism*. Kocienski was filmmaker in residence with Decolonizing Architecture Artists Residency, West Bank (2011). Her films have been screened at the Benaki Museum, Athens (2010); FormContent, London (2010); Pleasure Dome and TSV, Toronto (2012). She has performed at Whitechapel Gallery, London (2010) and Tenderpixel, London (2012).

cressidakocienski.blogspot.ca

MARYAM TAGHAVI is a Toronto-based interdisciplinary artist, who was born and raised in Iran. She received her BFA in 2008 from Emily Carr University (Vancouver). Her work includes drawing, photography, site-specific installation, and performance. Her practice is spread across social and spatial paradigms (the artist has been traveling between Iran and Canada since her graduation), and investigates the enigmatic relations between then and now, self and other, fiction and non-fiction. Examining the corporeal and psychological exchanges between architecture, domestic objects and the human body, she creates different scenarios for contemplation and forms of reception. She has participated in a number of exhibitions in Canada, Mexico and Iran.

maryamtaghavidotcom.wordpress.com

FRANCISCO-FERNANDO GRANADOS (Curator) is a Guatemalan-born, Toronto-based artist primarily focused on making live work. Disillusioned by nationalism, he is happy to be identified as a performance artist. He has presented work in venues including Kulturhuset Stockholm, Ex Teresa Arte Actual (Mexico City), The Hessel Museum at Bard College, RAPID PULSE (Chicago), the Darling Foundry (Montréal), the Vancouver Art Gallery, and LIVE (Vancouver). He is the recipient of a Governor General of Canada's Silver Medal for academic achievement, and holds a Masters of Visual Studies from the University of Toronto. He has been a member of the 7a*11d Collective (organizers of the 7a*11d International Festival of Performance Art in Toronto) since 2012.

francisco-fernando-granados.blogspot.ca

RICKY VARGHESE (Introductory Essay) is a doctoral candidate at the Department of Humanities, Social Sciences, and Social Justice in Education at the University of Toronto. His research interests lie at the intersection of aesthetic theory, the history of art, visual studies, film theory, and trauma and memory studies. He is presently working on a dissertation project that attempts to explore how the aesthetic representation of the architectural trope of the ruin relates to the psychoanalytic concepts of mourning, melancholia, and fetishism.

JOHANNA HOUSEHOLDER (Panel Moderator) has been making performances, video and other artworks since the late 1970s. A member of the notorious feminist ensemble, The Clichettes in the 1980s, Householder practices her own brand of cultural détournement. She has performed extensively, most recently in China, NYC, Sweden and Ireland. With Tanya Mars she edited *Caught in the Act: an anthology of performance by Canadian women*, YYZ Books, Toronto, 2005. Johanna is a co-founding member and co-curator of 7a*11d International Festival of Performance Art.



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