

## LAVERONICA

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Lawrence Abu Hamdan

### *The All Hearing*

Opening Saturday, 1 August 2015, 7 p.m.

04.08.15 – 31.10.15

**Laveronica Arte Contemporanea** presents 'The All Hearing', the first solo exhibition in Italy by Lawrence Abu Hamdan, curated by Robert Leckie.

Abu Hamdan explores the politics of listening through sound, video, sculpture, performance and installation. Recent works include a trilogy of audio essays that addresses the role of the voice in law, an installation about emergent technologies of audio-surveillance and a map that illustrates the compound genealogies of Somali accents. Insisting on voices as 'questionable objects', Abu Hamdan's practice probes the ways in which words and how they are said are subject to scrutiny, bureaucracy and injustice at the hands of the state and unpacks the often muddy relationships amongst listening, politics, borders, human rights, testimony and truth.

Laveronica presents Abu Hamdan's *Tape Echo* (2013–14) series, a recent body of work made in Cairo in which second-hand cassette tapes of Islamic sermons are the primary medium and object of inquiry. The cassette tape recording *Gardens of Death* (2013, 29 min), for example, captures the acoustic bleed between the dozens of open-topped party boats that line both sides of the river Nile. Made by steering a small motor boat, microphone in hand, along the shore, the work documents the arrhythmic cacophony that resonates out across the river from these ungovernably loud, competing loudspeaker jurisdictions. Presented on a type of light-projecting speakers that are a common sight in Cairo's streets and clubs, this work mimics the 'loudspeaker libertarianism' adopted by locals wishing to drown out the deafening din while also contributing to it.

The video *The All Hearing* (2014, 12 min) shows two local sheikhs delivering sermons on noise pollution in Cairo at the artist's request. This unorthodox intervention into the sonic landscape of the 'loudest city on Earth' followed on from the military regime's attempts to restrict such sermons to government-sanctioned topics (that week, the Prophet's Ascension to Heaven). Cutting between close-ups of the sheikhs' idiosyncratic addresses and wide shots of their congregations and the loudspeakers amplifying their voices in the streets outside, Abu Hamdan's images show how the sheikhs' message is disseminated in a way that contradicts its content. Likewise, towards the end of the video, a stack of speakers like those in *Gardens of Death* blurts out the highly appropriate lyrics to Shehta Karika's 'Miracle Alley' at full volume, over an infectious beat: 'Keep it down, man. Quiet, guys! Keep it down, woman, and go inside. Keep it down, keep it quiet. I could use some peace and quiet...'

*A Conversation with an Unemployed* (2013) comprises a series of blown-up images of the magnetic strips of second-hand cassette tapes bought from Cairo's Friday market. These tapes have had sermons recorded onto them, erased, then re-recorded over many times throughout their lives, leaving sonic remnants that have accumulated significantly over the years. Presented on bespoke light boxes, these remnants are now visible as gaps, crevices and ravines on the tape's surface, providing distinct sonic fingerprints of Cairo's audio culture.

Part of this culture is described in further detail in the final work in the exhibition, the voiceover-led audio work *The End of Every Illusionist* (2013), presented on a tape-echo machine in the main gallery. The title derives from the original cassette tape sermon that Abu Hamdan's commentary now overlays. His words address, in a physiological vernacular that appears to liken noise to an airborne infection and the body to an instrument, the common health issues caused by Cairo's debilitating loudness. The sounds of the city penetrate the flesh, the body falls ill amplified sermons – described as an 'ethical enema for the ear canals' – only exacerbate the issue, while overdubbed cassette tapes suffer memory loss.

The *Tape Echo* project was originally commissioned by *Beirut* in Cairo and Van Abbemuseum.

**Lawrence Abu Hamdan** (Amman, Jordan 1985) was The Armory Show Commissioned Artist 2015 and his work has been included in this year's New Museum Triennial 'Surround Audience', as well as in an upcoming exhibition at the Portikus, Frankfurt. The artist's video *The All Hearing* (2014) was selected for the 44th International Film Festival, Rotterdam. In 2014, his works became part of the permanent collections at MoMA; the Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven; and Barjeel Art Foundation, UAE. In 2013, Abu Hamdan's audio documentary *The Freedom of Speech Itself* was submitted as evidence at a UK asylum tribunal where the artist himself was called to testify as an expert witness. He continues to make sonic analyses for legal investigations and advocacy — most recently his work was a prominent part of the No More Forgotten Lives campaign for Defense Children International. The artist's forensic audio investigations are conducted as part of his research for Forensic Architecture at Goldsmiths College London where he is a PhD candidate and associate lecturer.

His previous solo exhibitions include 'Taqiyya—The Right to Duplicity' at Kunst Halle Sankt Gallen; 'Tape Echo' (2013) at both Beirut in Cairo and the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven; 'The Whole Truth' (2012) at Casco, Utrecht; and 'The Freedom Of Speech Itself' (2012) at The Showroom, London. Additionally, his works have been exhibited and performed at venues such as the Shanghai Biennial 2014; The Whitechapel Gallery,

London; MACBA, Barcelona; Tate Modern, London; M HKA, Antwerp; the Beirut Art Center; and the Taipei Biennial 2012. Abu Hamdan's writing can be found in *Forensis* (Sternberg Press), *Manifesta Journal* and *Cabinet Magazine*.