

The Line At Which

Film program curated by Beirut

Beirut Art Center

In the context of the exhibition *Video Vintage*, **Beirut Art Center** invited *Beirut* to propose a screening program. **The Line At Which** approaches an investigation, taking a closer look at two pivotal moments for the articulation of a new form of experimental cinema and video in Egypt, and their point of juncture with the visual arts.

In 1968, filmmaker and artist **Shadi Abdel Salam** was appointed head of the Department of Experimental Film, as a unit of the Public Documentary Film Center. Maintaining the visual image as the nucleus of cinema drove Abdel Salam's filmic inquiry. The oeuvre of documentary works that were produced at the Department in the early 1970's were less about "commenting on" images, as was common in Egyptian documentaries at the time, and more a way of finding new means of insisting on the image as the site of cinematic language.

Afaq, EG, 39min., 1972 by **Shadi Abdel Salam**

Abdel Salam's film *Afaq* depicts -without any commentary- through an extremely lyrical and theatrical use of photography, light and sound, an array of scenes from artistic and cultural activities within their environments, accompanied only by music. The film was originally commissioned by the Ministry of Culture and intended as a "media-film" (according to Abdel Salam), a task which he reluctantly accepted. Propagandistic in its opening lines, it is also subversive at times; the language he uses recalls surrealist references in parts, citing Eisenstein and Buñuel in others. At a moment in which Egypt was going through a state of sadness and despair, following the Naksa (1967) he realized that individuals and children within the realm of art and culture, beyond the ministry and its institutions, were emanating a force of hope. The film was awarded the Screenplay and Directing Award from the Egyptian Festival for Short Films and Documentaries in 1975.

Lungfan, EG, 14min., 1995 by **Hassan Khan** and **Amr Hosny**

In 1995, at the Atelier du Caire, Amr Hosny and Hassan Khan screened *Lungfan*, a film, originally a slide show, of photographic negatives and positives, transferred to 35mm slides, accompanied by music Khan had recorded and performed from segments of jam sessions (on a cassette tape). The event was met with great hostility. Rarely screened since, the film, according to the makers of the work, emanates from a sensibility that came from hyperventilation caused by hundreds of

(imaginary) fans in one's lungs; the film transmits a documentary impulse, and releases a highly charged sentiment that emerges out of the daily life of two young artists/musicians immersed within the social, intellectual and subcultural environment at the time, the film's undercurrents touch on the myth of the human civilization. The film emerged as a dialogue between Khan and Hosny, and is a complex synthesis of influences from Buñuel to Abdelhady El Gazzar, from Yassin El Tohamy to Jimi Hendrix, from William Burroughs to Marquis de Sade.

The film program, just under an hour long, is an intense tangent that touches on the genre of experimental video and film, at two different moments in Egypt, speaking to and from the world of auteur cinema and where it meets the (visual) arts: in subject, form and context. The strong emphasis on the visual and the musical, the stress on (often crude) montage, elucidates a trust in the image beyond the visual as merely descriptive, as representation, but the image as the location of meaning.

Shadi Abdel Salam (b. 1930 – d. 1986) was an Egyptian film director, screenwriter and costume and set designer.

Amr Hosny (b. 1974) is a FMCG Finance Professional with a passion for Visual Arts and Music.

Hassan Khan (b. 1975) is an artist, musician and writer. He lives and works in Cairo, Egypt.

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