

Press Release

Lawrence Abu Hamdan

Zifzafa

September 3rd (Tue) - November 3rd (Sun), 2024

Barakat Contemporary is pleased to present *Zifzafa*, Lawrence Abu Hamdan's first solo exhibition in Korea, from September 3 to November 3. Abu Hamdan is a researcher, filmmaker, artist, and activist who describes himself as a "Private Ear" using sound to shape his artistic practice. Abu Hamdan has conducted sonic investigations in Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, France, and the UK, which he conveys through his distinctive aesthetic vision. Together with his team at the newly founded organization *Earshot*, Abu Hamdan works closely with NGOs such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Defense for Children International, and B'Tselem, Abu Hamdan emphasizes the essential role of the "politics of listening" in his work. His sound pieces resonate with people on the margins of society, including those exposed to war and violence, and have been utilized as concrete legal evidence and advocacy.

Zifzafa, premiering at Barakat Contemporary, is an Arabic word that describes a wind that rattles and shakes all in its path. In this exhibition the word becomes a conceptual tool to map a network of social relations transformed through and by wind. In tracing *Zifzafa* we feel the connections between people, pollen, dust and animal through the vastness of open space. Yet in this exhibition we also see how *Zifzafa*'s engulfing noise can act as a border that restricts and confines, isolates and divides.

In 2023 political unrest erupted throughout the occupied Syrian Golan Heights on a scale unseen for more than 40 years. The focus point of this protest movement was the looming construction of 31, of the largest land based wind turbines on the last remaining open space left for the Jawlani¹ Syrians who have been living under Israeli military occupation since the 1967 war. Though European

¹ Jawlan is the Arabic word for the Golan Heights, and Jawlanis are the people of the Golan Heights. It is currently home to about 120,000 people, most of whom are Druze or Jewish people who immigrated from Israel.

regulations stipulate that a wind turbine of this size must be at least 2 kilometers away from the nearest residential developments, this project has planned turbines to be erected as close as 35 meters to the homes of the occupied Syrian residents of the Golan heights (Jawlani's), causing an unbearable amount of noise that will effectively force people off their land. With fellow researchers at *Earshot*, Abu Hamdan set about to create a tool that could help the Jawlani's contest the construction of these turbines and the sonic annexation of their lands. To simulate this, the group first measured and recorded noise at the only accessible site in Europe with the same 250 metre tall turbines, in Gaildorf, Germany. They digitally mapped the propagation of this noise onto the landscape in the occupied Golan Heights at the precise locations where these turbines are set to be built. *Earshot* teamed up with Jawlani musician Busher Kanj Saleh to make extensive field recordings in the area itself, capturing the communion between people and land. Over many months, he stuck the mic next to cows, bees, thunder, saxophones, shovels, weddings, late nights, playdates, ravens, bulbul, blackbirds, a shepherd playing the flute, jackals and water pumps. Simultaneously, Abu Hamdan and the team developed a virtual map within a video game platform called <*Zifzafa: a video game essay*>(2024) and convolved both layers of sound into the simulation, allowing a virtual walk through the site. *Zifzafa: a video-game essay* (2024), that at its simplest allows players to move through the site where the turbines will be constructed and hear the area with and without the sound of turbines from any point on the map. However with the turbines off this game also reveals a world without inherent spatial boundaries—a world of connected sounds, where jackals meet weddings, ravens meet flautists and bees meet self organised systems of irrigation in seamless continuity, free of the walls, territories, territorial waters, or airspace that typically define borders. *Zifzafa: a video-game essay* is composed of eight narratives and functions like a nonlinear film or documentary. When the wind turbine noise is turned on, the seamless connection of life between these houses becomes erased, overwritten. The noise of the turbines, or *Zifzafa*, becomes an invisible barrier that isolates the Jawlani community from the outside world, forcing them to relinquish their cultural, spiritual, political, and physical ties to the land that have been passed down through generations. In a place already struggling to be heard through the noise of Israeli and Russian fighter jets and drones and Hezbollah missiles. In a place whose GPS and radio signals are regularly jammed. Here the noise of the wind turbines become a further sonic obstacle to their audibility.

This digital simulation accompanied by a series of personal reflections and aesthetic gestures that are used in this exhibition to unfold a story of dispossession, resistance and the sonics of self-determination. Here, Abu Hamdan traces *Zifzafa*, a distinct form of sonic turbulence in which wind and sound uniquely intertwine and examines its deeper implications in the broader context of the merging forces of vibration and flow. *Zifzafa* is the wind that carried volcanic ash from an eruption

50,000 years ago, enriching the soil of the Golan Heights, which became the lifeblood of the Jawlani community. Given the existing abundance of wind in the Golan Heights and that the 31 wind turbines will only meet 0.6 percent of Israel's energy demands, the artist highlights the ironic reality that the Israeli government's true motive for building wind turbines in the Golan Heights is not clean energy but rather a project that seeks to dispossess people of their land divide a community whose power resides in their very collectivity.

In this exhibition, the noise of the wind turbines is not the only thing the audience is invited to listen to. In the powerful sculptural installation that fuses sound and video, *Wind Ensemble* (2024), the viewer experiences a performance of Jawlani saxophonist Amr Mdah ring out from the balcony of a farm house of which 1,300 similar sites of habitation are threatened by the looming construction of the wind turbines and the vast noise which they will generate. The construction of such farmhouses have been a tool of resistance to land dispossession by the Jawlani community for decades. Here, the house projected on the mesh of a huge bass amp becomes a stage for an exuberant act of sonic self-determination; the principle that on your land you decide what noise you make, what noise you permit and what sounds define your community.² With *Wind Ensemble*, Abu Hamdan begins at the micro level, focusing on noise resistance within the personal space of the home and gradually expanding its implications to a macro perspective.

Opposite *Wind Ensemble* is *Tilting at Windmills* (2024), a triptych that uses computer-generated imagery to animate the scattering and visualise the propagation of noise of wind turbines in the

2 "A Kookh (Akwakh) can be a home for tools to work the land, a storage for things long obsolete, a Kookh can be a hutch for animals, a place to stay warm in the winter and a shade from the sun in the summer. A Kookh can be a place to escape the noise of the city or a place to play your music as loud as you like and still not annoy your neighbors. The Kookh holds drums, rakes, bees, guests, books, inflatable pools that no longer inflate, tire chains, spiders, snakes, beds, memories, dinner, whiskey, gossip, pleading, and laughter in all kinds of languages. All the sounds of life you hear in this video-game simulation were recorded in and around the 1,300 Kookhs whose habitation is threatened by the looming construction of 31 wind turbines and the vast noise which these turbines generate. Many of the Kookhs stem from well before the 1967 war and the Israeli military occupation of these lands, but many are just a few years old. Some you can book on Airbnb. They are insulated, contemporary constructions that, though modest in size, are fully functional homes. These Kookhs were built more recently, since 2019, in the wake of the announcement of the wind turbine project, which came hand in hand with Trump's policy for the US to officially recognise these lands as belonging to Israel in open defiance of what international law prescribes as a military occupation. Jawlanis built many of the Kookhs stealthily under the cover of the COVID pandemic as a strategy, just like the planting of apple and cherry orchards have acted since 1967, to resist the ensuing expropriation and dispossession of their lands." From Lawrence Abu Hamdan's script for *Zifzafa: a video-game essay*, chapter II, "A home for all things".

Golan Heights environment.³ The animation resembles a large oil spill across the landscape, and through these images, viewers can witness the invisible noise of the wind turbines spreading across the Golan Heights—encompassing the volcanoes, villages, and even the borders. The work shows that of the 5 percent of land still remaining in the Golan heights for the Jawlani's after the 1967 annexation, this wind farm will bathe a quarter of that in noise. Likewise, The wallpaper piece *Haze* (2024) is a spectrograph that visualizes the sound of a 250 meter wind turbine. The spiraling noise created by the 70-meter-long turbine blades evokes the visual effect of a theater backdrop. *Haze* serves as a potent audiovisual metaphor in which the noise, a residual effect of wind energy, mirrors air pollution in the Golan Heights, transforming and overtaking the background and affecting fundamentally life on this land. Together, these visual works are an attempt to think through the symbolic and ideological function that the image of wind farms plays in contemporary society and seeks to establish another aesthetic regime by which to perceive something that is so often used to present a purely positive rendering of our world in the future.

Using sound as a focus of his argument, Abu Hamdan demonstrates the repercussions of this green energy project for a community living under military occupation. The artists work here shows how a tool for green energy becomes a weapon aimed at undermining the roots of the Jawlani people while exploiting Syria's natural resources. His claims are supported by the fact that the project was authorized by the Israeli government only after residents of the originally planned Israeli settlement of Nimrod protested, leading to its relocation near an illegally occupied Jawlani village. Al-Marsad, the veteran human rights organisation in the Golan Heights, revealed how this project strategically manipulates Israeli settler colonial policies under the guise of a "greenwashing" campaign, while violating international law and the basic human rights of a community living under military rule. In an ongoing struggle that spans from the past into the present, the Jawlani community in Syria continues their fight for the future of the next generation.

Lawrence Abu Hamdan's exploration of *Zifzafa* underscores the importance of sound as a communal and social experience. By exploring listening as one of the many ways we engage with the world, he investigates how we perceive our surroundings through our bodies, how we name spaces, and how we make sense of our environment. The poet Heo Soo-Kyung noted that "our bodies experience time

3 The title of this work, *Tilting at Windmills*, is drawn from a scene in Miguel de Cervantes' novel *Don Quixote*. In the scene, Don Quixote and his squire, Sancho Panza, encounter 30 to 40 windmills on the horizon. Sancho Panza sees them as mere windmills, but to Don Quixote they appear to be enormous monsters with long arms. Believing the windmill to be a giant, Don Quixote charges forward with his sword, only to be struck down by the relentless spinning of its blades. The expression "tilting at windmills" means attacking imaginary enemies or evils. This somewhat comical episode from *Don Quixote* resonates with the current situation of the Jawlani people, who are fighting a massive Israeli government wind turbine project. Given the acoustic effects of wind turbine noise, it is difficult to decide which of the two characters' beliefs is more far-fetched.

very differently depending on our surroundings.”⁴ If the Israeli government’s wind turbine project—a blatant example of greenwashing—were to invade the Golan Heights, we might share the same time as the Jawlanis, yet the noise and dust winds of this “green energy” would confine their lives, their bodies, and ultimately their time. Though construction of the wind farm on occupied Jawlani land is now inevitable, the work of the artist to document the sound of this site before the turbines bathe it in noise is an act that will at least, digitally preserve this landscape before it is lost to future generations and allowing us the inhabitants of the *Zifzafa* exhibition to share this moment in time.

4 Heo, Soo-Kyung, *I was at the excavation site | A story that started in Babylon* (Seoul: Nanda, 2018), p. 136.

Overview of the Exhibition

1. Date

- Tuesday, September 3rd - Sunday, November 3rd, 2024
- 10:00 - 18:00 | Tuesday - Sunday

2. Address

- 58-4, Samcheong-ro, Jongno-gu, Seoul, Korea

3. Inquiry

- info@barakat.kr
- +82 2 730 1948

1. About the Artist

Lawrence Abu Hamdan (b. 1985)

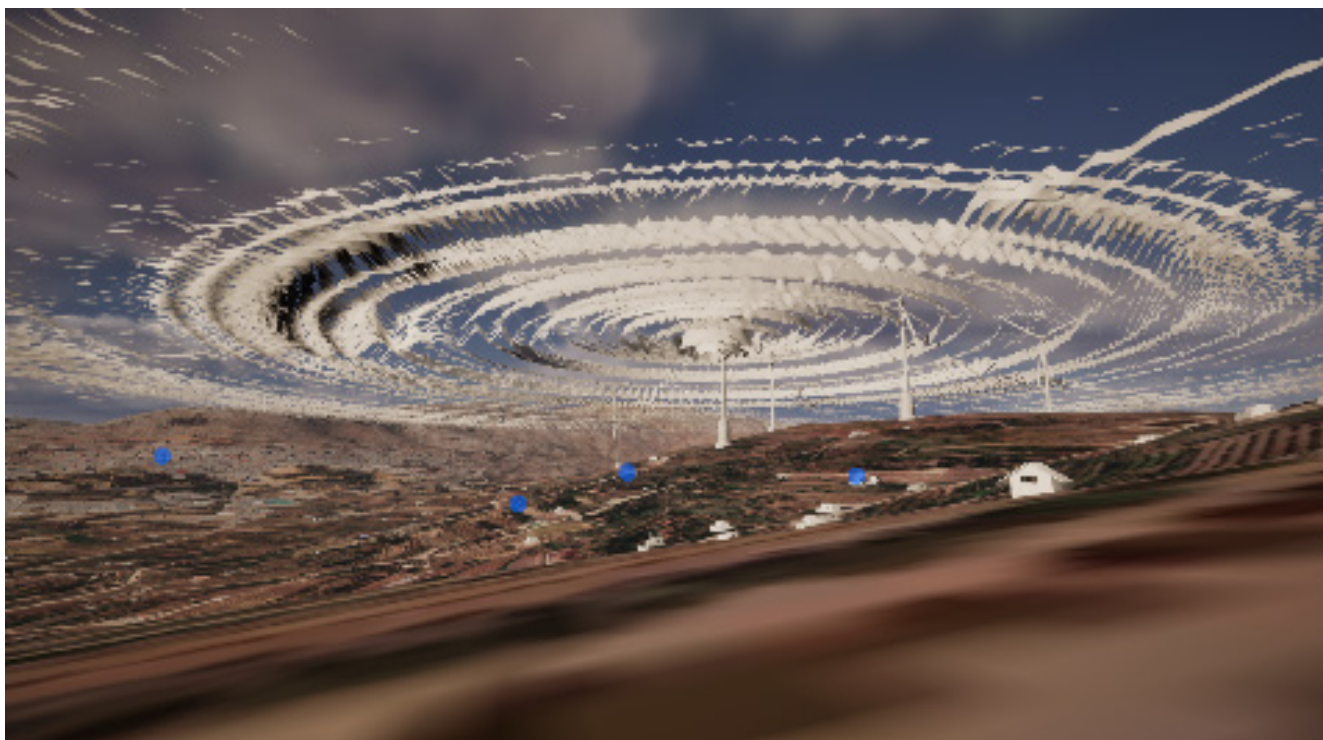


Lawrence Abu Hamdan, profile image. Image courtesy of the artist, © Miro Kuzmanovic

Lawrence Abu Hamdan studied Sonic Arts at Middlesex University in the UK, where he combined acoustic phenomena with artistic experimentation. He later completed his MA and PhD at Goldsmiths, University of London, where he worked with Forensic Architecture, researching the role of sound in legal investigations and political discourse.

Abu Hamdan has held fellowships and visiting professorships at the University of Chicago, the New School in New York, and the Johannes Gutenberg University in Mainz. His projects, which examine the political and cultural dimensions of sound and listening, have been presented in leading museums and institutions and at major international art events, including MoMA in New York, MUAC in Mexico, the 22nd Sydney Biennale, the 58th Venice Biennale, the 11th Gwangju Biennale, the 13th and 14th Sharjah Biennial, the 34th São Paulo Biennial, Tate Modern, Hammer Museum in Los Angeles, and Hamburger Bahnhof in Berlin. His works are part of the collections of Reina Sofia, MoMA, the Guggenheim, Hamburger Bahnhof, Van Abbemuseum, Centre Pompidou, Tate Modern, Jameel Arts Centre, Kadist, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, and the Sharjah Arts Foundation, among others. Internationally acclaimed, Abu Hamdan has won the Grand Prize at the Winterthur International Film Festival, the 2020 Toronto Biennial Audience Prize, the Edvard Munch Art Award in 2019, the prestigious Turner Prize for Contemporary Art in the UK in 2019, Best Short Film at the Rotterdam International Film Festival in 2017 and 2016, and the Nam June Paik Prize for New Media.

2. Major Works



Lawrence Abu Hamdan, *Zifzafa: a video-game essay*, 2024

Runtime 40 minutes approximately, Video Game simulation, Stereo sound, Joystick

Image courtesy of the artist and Barakat Contemporary

With fellow researchers at Earshot, Abu Hamdan set about to create a tool that could help the occupied Syrians of the Golan heights (Jawlani's) contest the construction of these turbines by simulating how this noise will deeply effect life on their lands. To do this they first began by measuring and recording in Gaildorf Germany, the only accessible site in Europe with these larger 256 meter turbines. The team then digitally mapped the propagation of this noise onto the landscape in the occupied Golan Heights at the precise locations where these turbines were set to be built. In order to simulate the actual effect these turbines will have on the environment Earshot teamed up with Jawlani musician Busher Kanj Saleh who made extensive field recordings of the area. Over many months Kanj Abu Saleh stuck the mic next to cows, bees, thunder, saxophones, shovels, weddings, sahrat, playdates, ravens , bulbul, blackbirds, a shepherd playing the flute, jackals and water pumps. All the sounds that Kanj Abu Saleh felt captured the commune between the people and their land. These recordings were then geolocated these recordings on our map and inserted the recordings with the ones from Germany into a video game platform.



Lawrence Abu Hamdan, *Zifzafa: a video-game essay* (still image), 2024
Runtime 40 minutes approximately, Video Game simulation, Stereo sound, Joystick
Image courtesy of the artist and Barakat Contemporary

In this simulation residents of that area can virtually walk into their land, and hear directly how loud the turbine will sound from that or any location on the map. This simulation can then be used to demonstrate to lawyers and judges exactly the way their lives will be affected. Moreover should these turbines finally be constructed, this video game simulation, will serve another purpose entirely. It will serve as an archive of how the area sounded before the turbines came. All the recordings Kanj Saleh made capture the character of the place and should that character be fundamentally altered by the imposition of these turbines then the game will be a place where the sound of life before the turbines will remain audible. It is in these sounds that we invite the audience in this gallery to spend time listening. Together with the voice-over that can be found at the 8 sites where the player encounters the freestanding megaphones, these sounds form a non-linear audiovisual essay about the sonics of self determination.

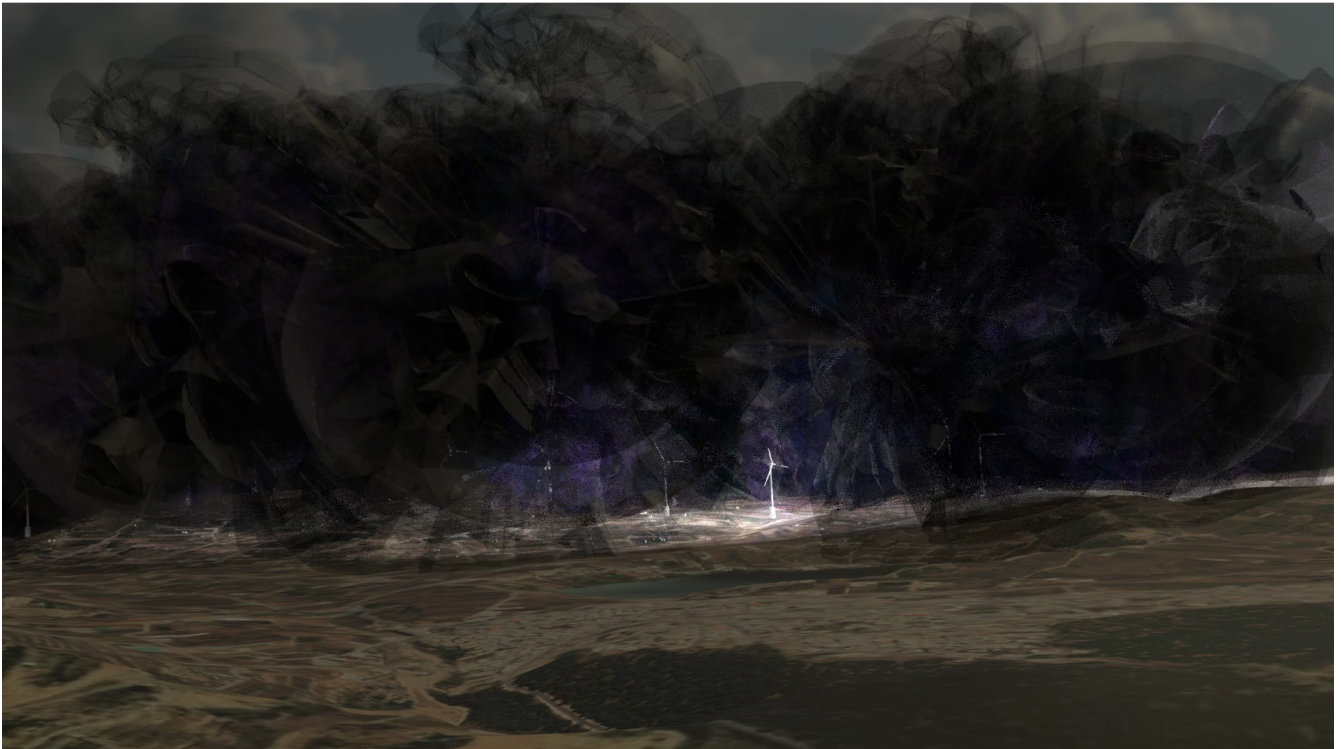


Lawrence Abu Hamdan, *Wind Ensemble*, 2024

12 minutes, dimensions variable, sound, color, single-channel video projection, Amplifier.

Image courtesy of the artist and Barakat Contemporary

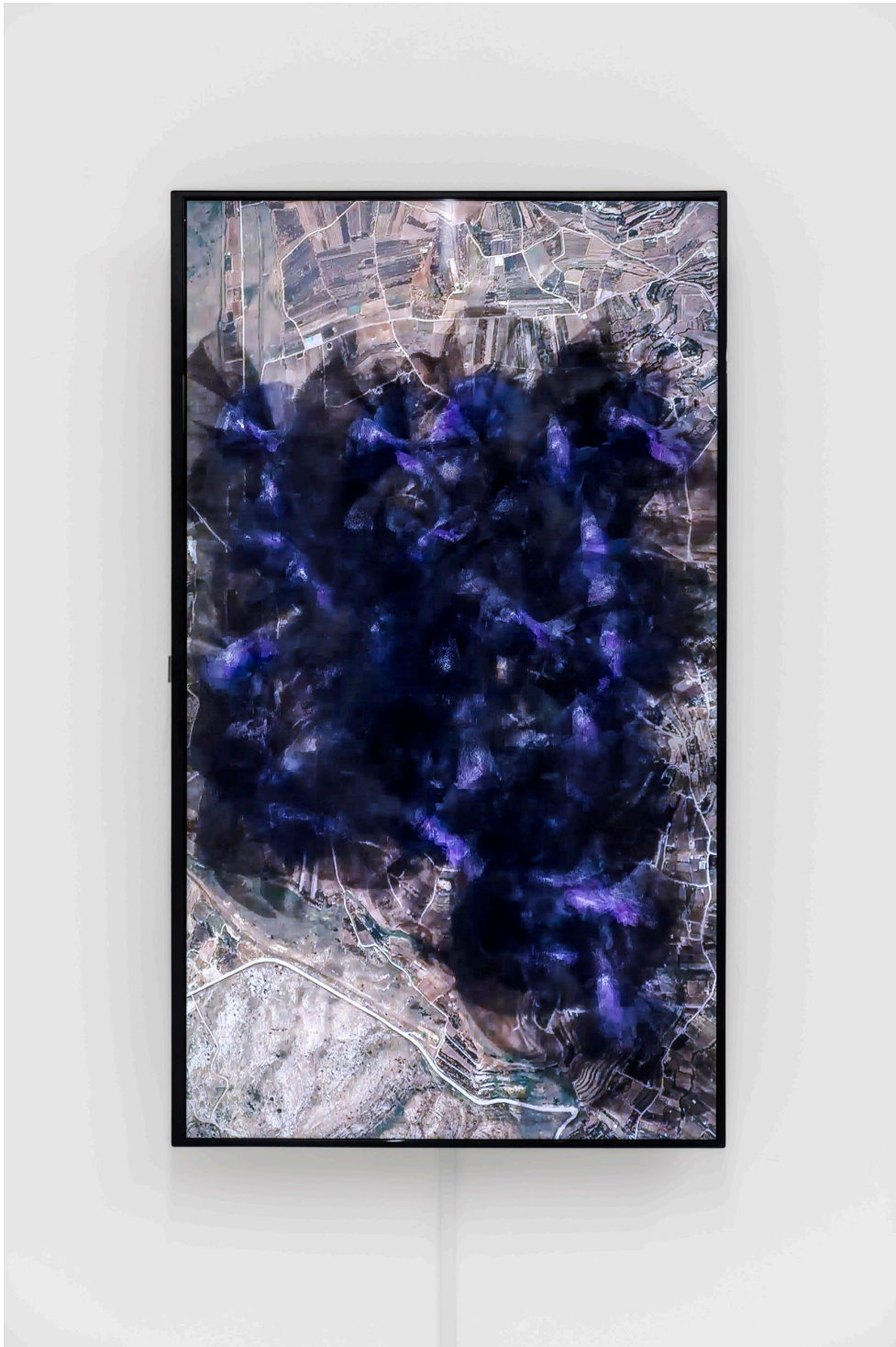
This audiovisual installation documents a performance of Jawlani saxophonist Amr Mdah ringing out from the balcony of a farm house of which 1300 similar sites of habitation are threatened by the looming construction of the wind turbines and the vast noise which they will generate. The construction of such farmhouses have been a tool of resistance to land dispossession by the Jawlani community for decades. Here, the house projected on a the mesh of a huge bass amp becomes a stage for an exuberant act of sonic self-determination; the principle that on your land you decide what noise you make, what noise you permit and what sounds define your community.



**Lawrence Abu Hamdan, *Tilting at Windmills*, *Tilting at Windmills i*, *Tilting at Windmills ii*, 2024
6 seconds, dimensions variable, CGI animation, colour.**

Image courtesy of the artist and Barakat Contemporary

The image of Wind turbines leak into all manner of advertisements, branding, screensavers, school classrooms and almost all renderings of our world in the future. It has become a form of ambient communication, an ideological image that emits progress and acts to calm the nerves of those consumed by the climate crisis. Its an image that speaks. Softly it says “everything will be alright”. But its actual voice, the noise it makes, complicates this pristine image. This work is an attempt to visualise the sonic turbulence created by wind turbines and showing the amount of acoustic space they consume.



Lawrence Abu Hamdan, *Tilting at Windmills*, 2024
6 seconds, dimensions variable, CGI animation, colour.
Image courtesy of the artist and Barakat Contemporary



Lawrence Abu Hamdan, *Haze*, 2024

dimensions variable, wallpaper.

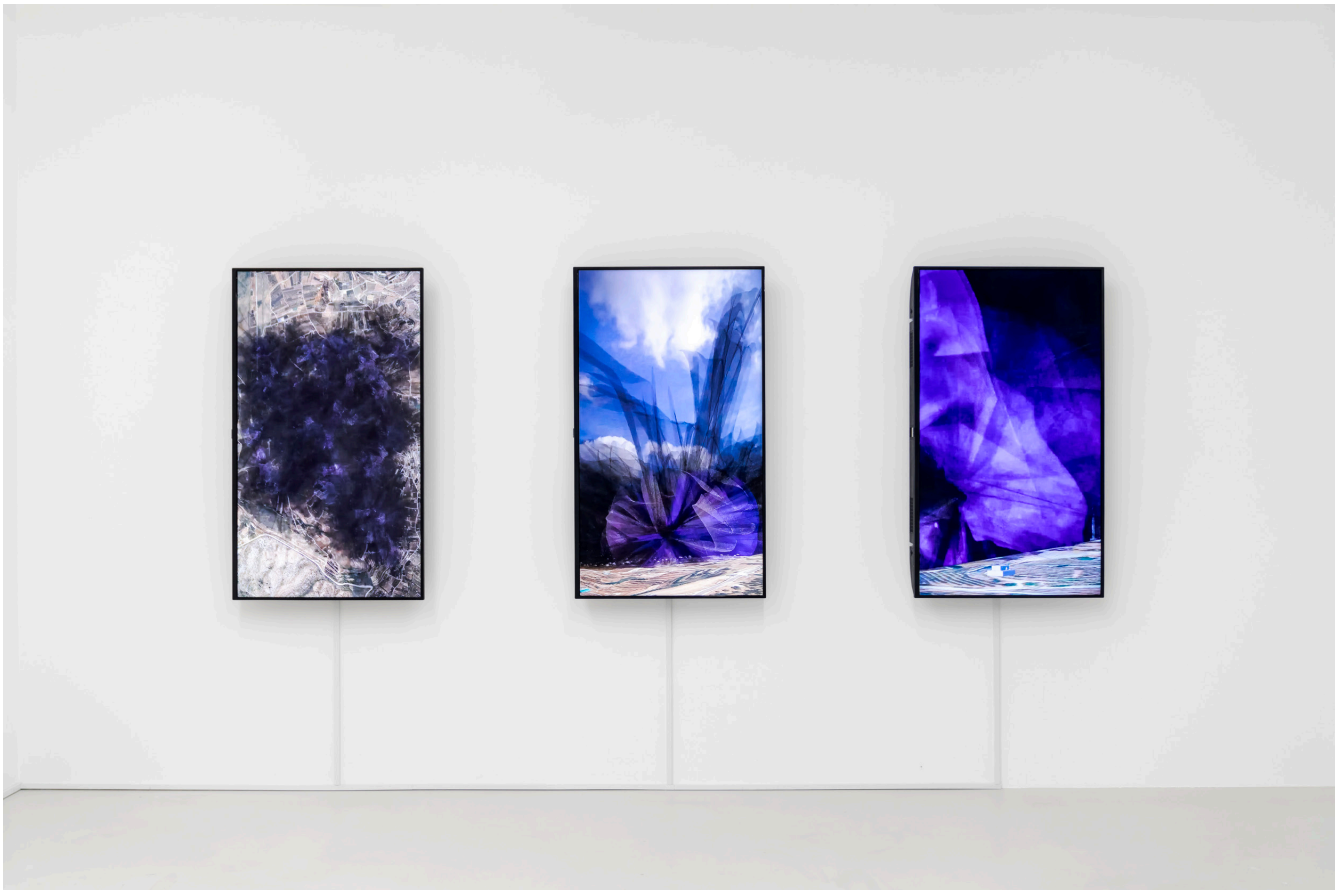
Image courtesy of Barakat Contemporary

This wallpaper work shows a spectrograph, a visualisation of the sound of a 250m wind turbine. The spiralling rotation of the 70m blades produce a visual effect of a fabric drape not dissimilar to a theatrical backdrop. Both establishing a milieu and a boundary that obstructs lines of sight. In this way it becomes a potent audiovisual metaphor for thinking about the waste product of wind energy, noise, as a form of atmospheric pollution that engulfs and occupies the background, the setting, the scene.

3. Installation views



Installation view of Lawrence Abu Hamdan: *Zifzafa*, 2024
Barakat Contemporary, Seoul, Korea
Image courtesy of Barakat Contemporary



Installation view of Lawrence Abu Hamdan: *Zifzafa*, 2024
Barakat Contemporary, Seoul, Korea
Image courtesy of Barakat Contemporary



Installation view of Lawrence Abu Hamdan: *Zifzafa*, 2024

Barakat Contemporary, Seoul, Korea

Image courtesy of Barakat Contemporary