

Press Release

Wael Shawky

Telematch and Other Stories

February 28th - April 27th, 2025

Barakat Contemporary is pleased to present Wael Shawky's (b. 1971, Egypt) second solo exhibition at the gallery, on view from February 28 to April 27, 2025. The exhibition revisits Wael Shawky's pivotal early video works from the early 2000s: three works from the *Telematch* series (2007–2009), *Al Aqsa Park* (2006), and *The Cave (Amsterdam)* (2005). In line with Shawky's ongoing projects that reinterpret established historical narratives to complicate concepts of artistic, religious, and national identity, these works investigate systemic and social dichotomies by reframing them in an often playful and unexpected manner. Furthermore, they put forward a mode of storytelling distinctive to that of more recent works, one that scrutinizes and employs the methodologies of how information is disseminated and received in popular media.

Born in Alexandria, Egypt, in 1971, Shawky emigrated with his family at an early age to Mecca, Saudi Arabia during the influx of foreign professionals into the country following the oil boom. He has often described this experience as formative to his practice, as he witnessed the coexistence of local traditions—including those of the Bedouin and various other tribes—alongside accelerating urbanization. Additionally, living in Islam's holiest city, religiosity became a vital element in his artistic exploration. Migration remains a key theme in Shawky's work, and the selected pieces in this exhibition engage with the transition and convergence of cultures—between nomadism and urbanity, tradition and modernity, and the East and the West. Shawky interrogates the mechanisms that shape societal progress and historical narratives through such intersections.

Spread across both gallery floors are three works from the *Telematch* series: *Telematch Sadat* (2007), *Suburb* (2008), and *Shelter* (2008). Shawky takes direct inspiration from the eponymous West German television show aired during the 1970s, which was widely exported and popular in

Saudi Arabia during Shawky's childhood. In the TV series, two German towns compete in timed games in which the players wear outrageous costumes making their movements awkward and comical. The *Telematch* series adopts the show's format in which disparate cultures clash and exchange for entertainment.

Telematch Sadat reenacts Egyptian president Anwar Sadat's (1918-1981) 1981 assassination and funeral, an event that remains deeply embedded in Egyptian collective memory. The event was recorded by state television, as it took place during a military parade celebrating the Egyptian victory at the onset of the 1973 Yom Kippur War, or the Fourth Arab-Israeli War. It then eventually led to another dictatorship under Hosni Mubarak (1928-2020) that lasted 30 years. Shawky instructed a group of Bedouin children—who have no knowledge of Sadat or his assassination—to perform the event, replacing military parade vehicles with donkeys and camel caravans. Shawky often works with children, as he does with marionettes and masks in later works, to avoid any interpretation via the actors' performance or their social and gender roles. In this way, the event is revisited from a detached yet striking lens.

In *Telematch Suburb*, Shawky invited a heavy metal band to perform in a rural village in the Egyptian Delta. The villagers had never experienced anything of the kind and the artist did not reveal the film's intention to any of the participants. Not surprisingly, the concert is met with confused and unenthusiastic reactions. *Telematch Shelter* presents a simple loop of children continuously entering and exiting a mud hut in Egypt's Western Desert, signifying a perpetual transition between nomadism and settlement. In both works "modernity" is set against the so-called "primitive" or "traditional," which oftentimes are the exoticized performers for the former. The power dynamics reversed and the displacement perpetuated, Shawky ravel's the unilateral direction of development and progress.

The Cave (Amsterdam) (2005) is one of three iterations of *The Cave*, alongside versions filmed in Istanbul (2004) and Hamburg (2006). In this work, Shawky walks down the aisles of a supermarket in Amsterdam, reciting from memory "Surah al-Khaf" ("The Cave") from the Qur'an. The story also exists in Christianity in a slight variation. In the verse, a group of young devout men find refuge in a cave to escape persecution by nonbelieving villagers. To protect them, God puts them to sleep for 309 years. When they are woken up, they propagate God's miraculous power themselves as proof to the new generation. Islamic scholars often link this narrative to the Prophet Muhammad's migration from Mecca to Medina in pursuit of knowledge and power. Similarly, Shawky's serial performance in Istanbul and Hamburg points to his own migration as an artist. Starkly contrasted with the epitome of the capitalist display, the unsettling foreignness of his performance speaks

for the impact or even incongruity of globalization on religion and local cultures. On the one hand, the artist's position, reminiscent of a news reporter, remains ambiguous—he maintains a certain neutrality to expose the fissure between irreconcilable systems rather than simply critiquing the dominance of consumerism.

Al Aqsa Park (2006) is a computer animation that depicts the Dome of the Rock in continuous rotation, gliding up and down. Built between 689 and 691 AD in Jerusalem, the Dome is historically and still a highly contested site between Palestine and Israel, as it is one of the most sacred locations in both Muslim and Judeo-Christian traditions. Shawky renders it weightless, adorned with marquee lights, transforming it into a carnival attraction or even a UFO. The Dome endlessly pendulates like the unresolvable polarities, whereas the funfair spectacle suggests that it has also become the very performative apparatus of political and ideological forces.

Wael Shawky's works in this exhibition bring together seemingly incompatible worlds by displacing them from their original context and placing them side by side to reveal their complex sociopolitical layers. They borrow the language of mass media, a source of supposed authoritative information and entertainment, to situate nonfictional events and communities between definitive moments in history. And it is often this continual migration of peoples and ideas that propels the most well-known stories, behind what has already been settled and denominated.

On the other hand, compared to his more recent works such as *The Cabaret Crusades* (2010-2015) and *Drama 1882* (2024) in which Shawky further elaborates on historical narratives, these early videos stay acute to the nature of their subjects. Deeming each local society and custom autonomous, the artist does not alter their character but simply builds a stage to let it unwind itself in the process of negotiation and collision. Due to its course, Shawky distances himself from direct critique; his role is as a translator and interpreter of history as he often describes. Whether it be working with children or an abrupt clash of uninformed guests, he brings in a detached, neutral device that functions as a kind of hinge, enabling rigid systems to bend and come into contact.

And to revisit the works now, they gain more relevance like the awakened Sleepers. In an era of increasing sociopolitical polarization, where each side is blinded by its ideals, we find that the concept of human advancement is not unidirectional. It is more like the merry-go-round, and it is still rotating.

Overview of the Exhibition

1. Date

- February 28th - April 27th, 2025
- 10:00 - 18:00 | Tuesday - Sunday

2. Address

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

3. Inquiry

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

1. About the Artist

Wael Shawky (b. 1971)



Profile of Wael Shawky © M Leuven

Wael Shawky (b. 1971, Alexandria) is a leading contemporary artist from the Middle East, known for blending fact and fiction across diverse media including drawing, painting, performance, and installation, with a focus on film and video. Through lyrical visuals and extensive inquiry into history and mythology, he reinterprets Middle Eastern historical narratives, challenging fixed Western perspectives. His epic films explore artistic, religious, and transnational identities, offering a nuanced dialogue that bridges cultures rather than without privileging one perspective over another.

Shawky is widely recognized for works such as the *Cabaret Crusades* trilogy (2010–2015), which uses marionettes to reenact the history of the medieval Crusades from an Arab perspective; the *Al Araba Al Madfunna* trilogy (2012–2016), which reimagines myths through performances by child actors; and *Drama 1882* (2024), showcased at the Egypt Pavilion of the 2024 Venice Biennale.

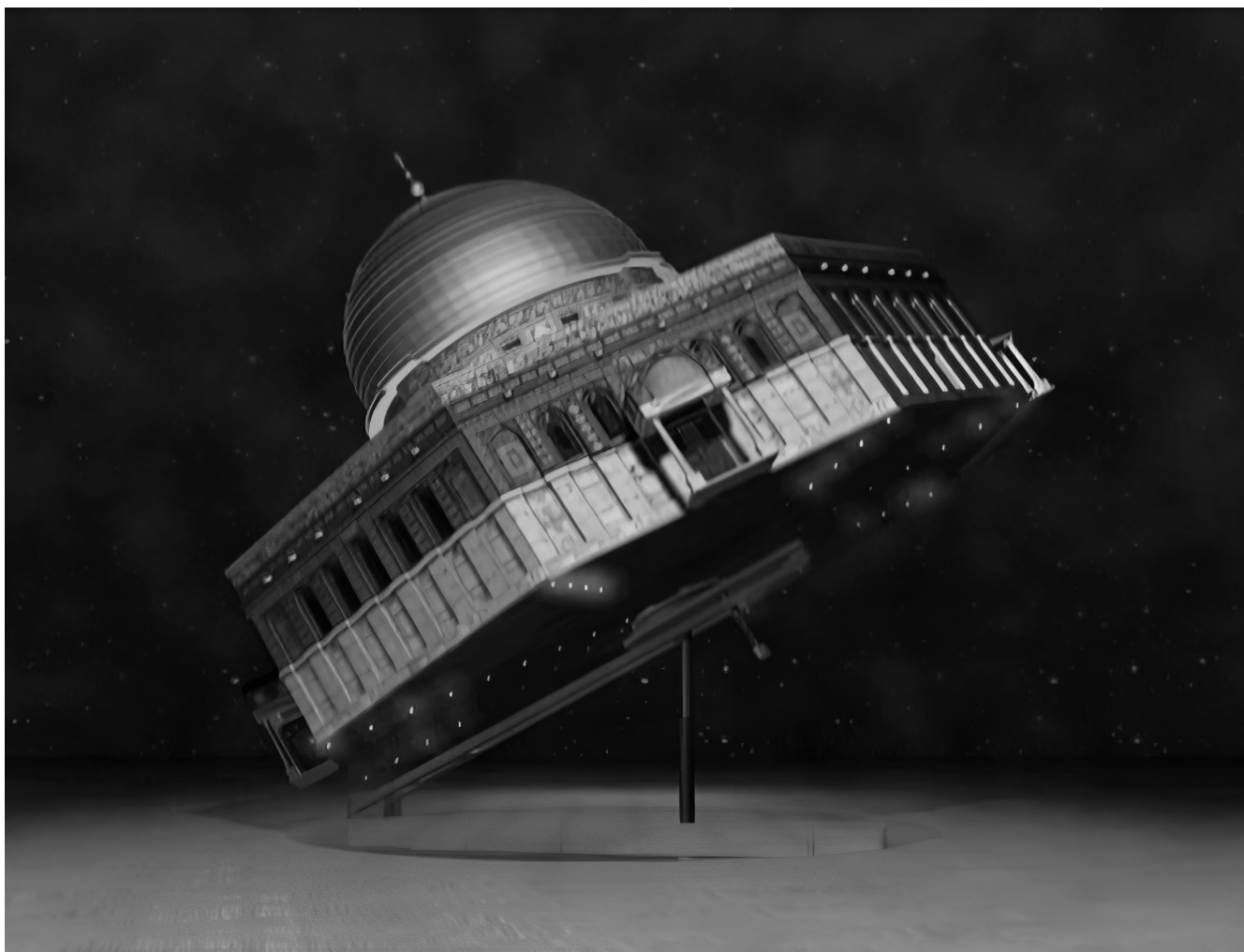
Based in Alexandria, Egypt, and Philadelphia, USA, Wael Shawky has held numerous major solo exhibitions, including at Talbot Rice Gallery (2025, upcoming), Daegu Art Museum (2024), the Egypt Pavilion at the Venice

Biennale (2024); M Leuven in Belgium (2022); the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Texas (2021); Castello di Rivoli Museum of Contemporary Art and the Fondazione Merz in Turin (2016); MoMA PS1 in New York (2015), Serpentine Galleries in London (2013–14); and KW Institute for Contemporary Art in Berlin (2012). His participation in significant group exhibitions includes the Sharjah Biennial (2025, 2019, 2013); Istanbul Biennial (2015, 2005); documenta in Kassel (2012); Gwangju Biennale (2012); and the Venice Biennale (2003). In addition to his artistic practice, Shawky founded MASS Alexandria in 2015, an independent art school in Alexandria that supports emerging artists in the region.

His works are part of major international museum collections, including the Museum of Modern Art in New York; Tate Modern in London; Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art in Doha; Sharjah Art Foundation; National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art (MMCA), Korea; Guggenheim Abu Dhabi; MACBA in Barcelona; and the National Gallery of Canada.

Shawky has received many awards for his work, including the Honorary Citizenship of the City of Palermo (2017); the Sharjah Biennial Award (2013); Award for the Filmic Oeuvre created by Louis Vuitton; Kino der Kunst, Munich (2013); Abraaj Capital Art Prize, Dubai, joint winner (2012); Schering Stiftung Art Award, Berlin (2011); Grand Prize, 25th Alexandria Biennale (2009). In 2011, he was an Artist in Residence at The Center for Possible Studies, Serpentine Gallery, London.

2. Selected Works



Wael Shawky, *Al Aqsa Park*, still image, 2006, video animation, 10 min.
Image courtesy of Barakat Contemporary.



Wael Shawky, *Telematch Shelter*, still image, 2008, single-channel video, sound, 4 min 26 sec.
Image courtesy of Barakat Contemporary.



Wael Shawky, *The Cave (Amsterdam)*, still image, 2005, single-channel video, sound, subtitles, 12 min 45 sec.

Image courtesy of Barakat Contemporary.



Wael Shawky, *Telematch Sadat*, still image, 2007, single-channel video, sound, 10 min 34 sec.
Image courtesy of Barakat Contemporary.



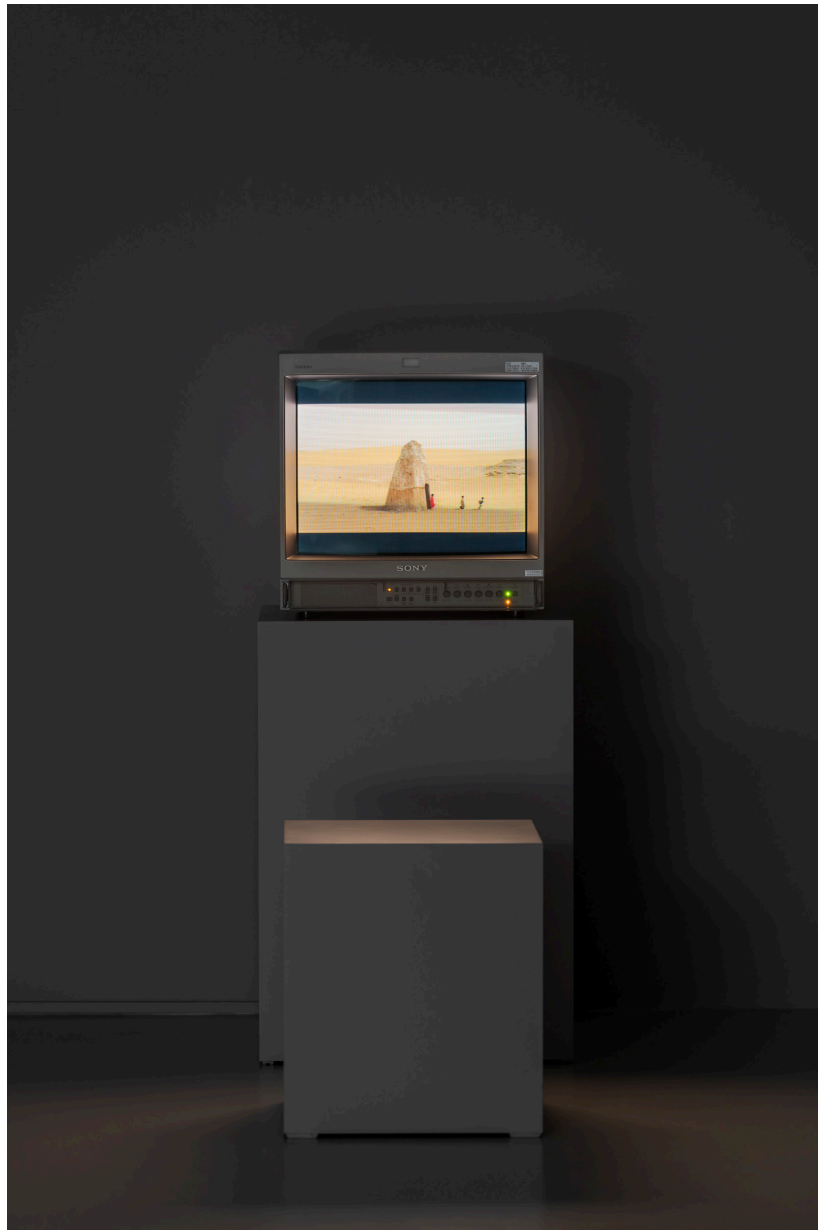
Wael Shawky, *Telematch Suburb*, still image, 2008, single-channel video, sound, 9 min 8 sec.

Image courtesy of Barakat Contemporary.

3. Installation views



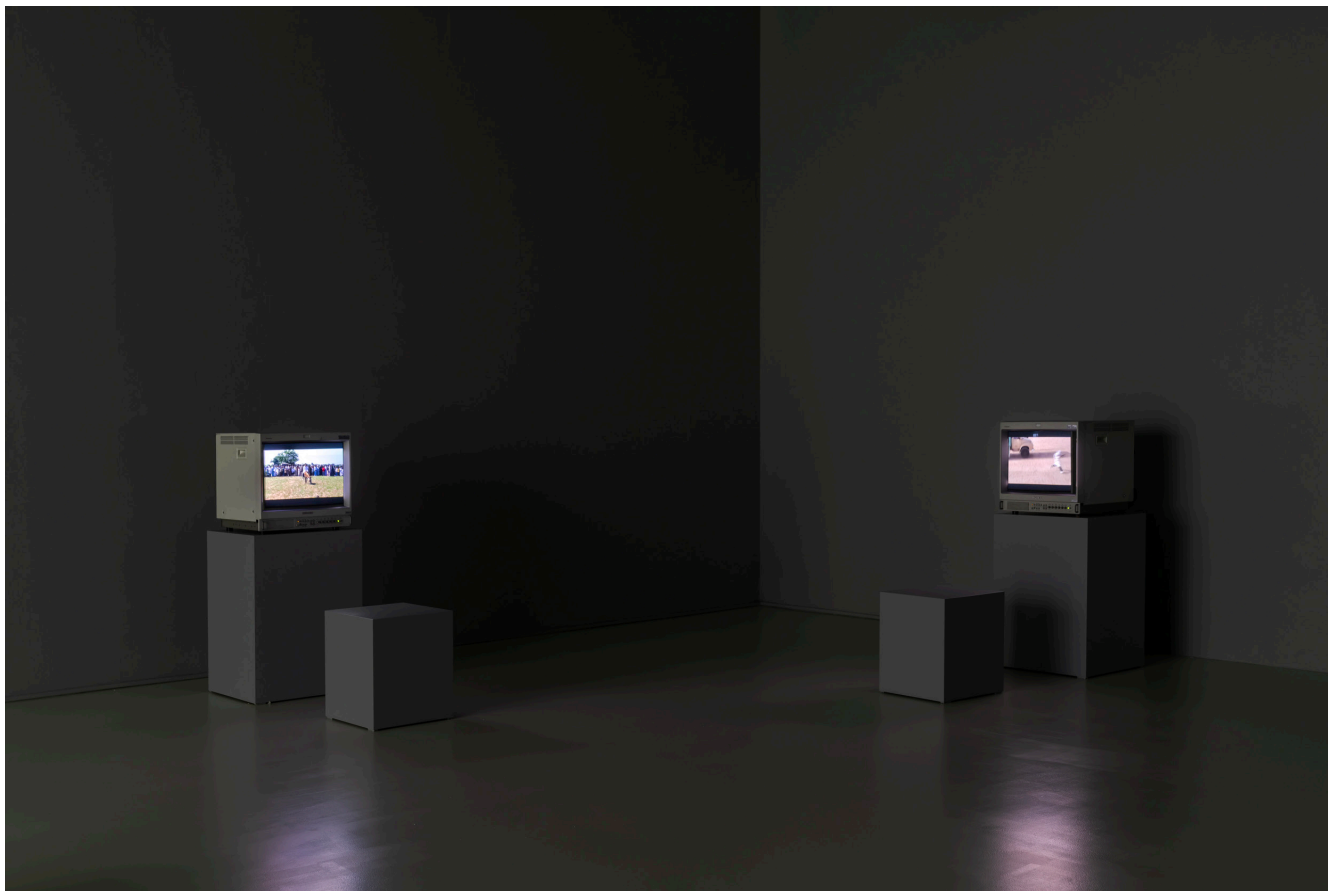
Wael Shawky, *Al Aqsa Park*, 2006, video animation, 10 min.
Installation view of *Wael Shawky: Telematch and Other Stories*, 2025, Barakat Contemporary, Seoul, Korea.
Image courtesy of Barakat Contemporary.



Wael Shawky, *Telematch Shelter*, 2008, single-channel video, sound, 4 min 26 sec.
Installation view of *Wael Shawky: Telematch and Other Stories*, 2025, Barakat Contemporary, Seoul, Korea.
Image courtesy of Barakat Contemporary.



Wael Shawky, *The Cave* (Amsterdam), 2005, single-channel video, sound, subtitles, 12 min 45 sec.
Installation view of *Wael Shawky: Telematch and Other Stories*, 2025, Barakat Contemporary, Seoul, Korea.
Image courtesy of Barakat Contemporary.



Installation view of *Wael Shawky: Telematch and Other Stories*, 2025, Barakat Contemporary, Seoul, Korea.
Image courtesy of Barakat Contemporary.



Wael Shawky, *Telematch Sadat*, 2007, single-channel video, sound, 10 min 34 sec.

Installation view of *Wael Shawky: Telematch and Other Stories*, 2025, Barakat Contemporary, Seoul, Korea.

Image courtesy of Barakat Contemporary.



Wael Shawky, still image, 2008, single-channel video, sound, 9 min 8 sec.

Installation view of *Wael Shawky: Telematch and Other Stories*, 2025, Barakat Contemporary, Seoul, Korea.

Image courtesy of Barakat Contemporary.