

Portikus is pleased to present *Earshot*, Lawrence Abu Hamdan's first solo exhibition in Germany. In his art and research, Abu Hamdan, who lives in Beirut, explores the perception of language and sound and the politics of listening. His projects have taken the form of audiovisual installations, performances, graphic works, photography, Islamic sermons, cassette tape compositions, potato chip packets, essays, and lectures. Discourses of national identity, human rights, and the administration of justice are recurrent themes in his art, and the techniques of his audio-aesthetic practice have become the basis through which he has become known as a "private ear," conducting forensic audio analysis for several legal investigations.

In May 2014, Israeli soldiers in the occupied West Bank (Palestine) shot and killed two teenagers, Nadeem Nawara and Mohamad Abu Daher. The human rights organization Defence for Children International contacted Forensic Architecture, a Goldsmiths College-based agency that undertakes advanced architectural and media research. They worked with Abu Hamdan to investigate the incident. The case hinged upon an audioballistic analysis of the recorded gunshots to determine whether the soldiers had used rubber bullets, as they asserted, or broken the law by firing live ammunition at the two unarmed teenagers.

A detailed acoustic analysis, for which Abu Hamdan used special techniques designed to visualize the sound frequencies, established that they had fired live rounds, and moreover had tried to disguise these fatal shots to make them sound as if they were rubber bullets. These visualizations later became the crucial piece of evidence that was picked up by the news channel CNN and other international news agencies, forcing Israel to renounce its original denial. The investigation was also presented before the U. S. Congress as an example of Israel's contravention of the American-Israeli arms agreement. A little over a year after Abu Hamdan completed his report, he returns to the case of Abu Daher and Nawara in his exhibition *Earshot*. Expanding on the original body of evidence, he has created an installation encompassing sound, photographic prints, and a video to reflect more

broadly on the aesthetics of evidence and the politics of sound and silence. The video, *Rubber Coated Steel*, is the main part of the new installation commissioned by Portikus and acts as a tribunal for these serial killing sounds. The video tribunal does not preside over the voices of the victims but rather seeks to amplify their silence, fundamentally questioning the ways in which rights are being heard today.

The exhibition setup loosely resembles the architecture of a firing range, not unlike the one that can be seen in the video *Rubber Coated Steel*. Panels hang at eye level, suspended from parallel steel

beams. Further up, *Rubber Coated Steel* is displayed directly in front of the balcony, transforming it into an observation deck. Some panels, their back surfaces, and the balcony are covered with composite foam cladding to improve the room's acoustics while also emphasizing the central role of suppressed sound in the exhibition's theme.

The images are spectrograms: visualizations of the frequency spectrum of a given signal—in this instance, of the sounds of various projectiles. The spectrograms depict the timing, pitch, and loudness of projectiles ranging from a sound grenade across a rubber bullet to live ammunition fired from an M-16 rifle. The horizontal axis represents time; each image captures a one-second timeframe. The vertical axis corresponds to pitch, with low frequencies near the bottom and high frequencies near the top of the panels. The color temperature codes the loudness of a given pitch at a particular moment in time: red is loudest, while green is less loud and blue is a very low volume.

Time and distance are mapped onto the exhibition space itself. The positions of the panels in the room indicate where the respective projectiles would be on their trajectory if they had been fired from the gallery entrance and then stopped after 0.01 seconds. The setting turns into a virtual snapshot. The spectrogram of a rubber bullet, for example, appears near the entrance, whereas live ammunition fired at the same moment has traveled at a higher velocity and is represented by visualizations near the far end of the room. There are two lines across the room in the layout sketch: one indicates the sound barrier, the other symbolizes the international legal regulations determining which kinds of ammunitions may be used against civilians in conflict situations. Everything beyond this line in the exhibition represents a violation of international law.

The exhibition focuses on the visual examination of sound and signals rather than their audible qualities, as *Rubber Coated Steel* underscores. Lawrence Abu Hamdan's video simulates an inquest that might have been conducted; on the ground floor, the panels represent an acoustic lexicon of projectiles—the visual record of a secret language in the exchange between the individual firing the shot and the one being shot at.

An accompanying artist book will be co-published by Portikus, Kunst Halle Sankt Gallen and Sternberg Press and made available during the course of the exhibition.

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