

Chisenhale Gallery presents a new co-commission by Beirut-based artist and ‘private ear’, Lawrence Abu Hamdan. *Earwitness Theatre* develops Abu Hamdan’s enquiry into the political effects of listening, presenting a new commission that explores the hallucinatory world of the earwitness. Abu Hamdan’s exhibition is commissioned and produced by Chisenhale Gallery in partnership with: Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art, Rotterdam; Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis; and Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane and it will be presented at the partner venues throughout 2019.

Abu Hamdan’s work questions the ways in which rights are being heard and the way voices can become politically audible. In 2016 Abu Hamdan was asked to create dedicated earwitness interviews for Amnesty International and Forensic Architecture, Goldsmiths, University of London’s investigation into the Syrian regime prison of Saydnaya. It is estimated that as many as 13,000 people have been executed in Saydnaya since 2011. Inaccessible to independent observers and monitors, the violations taking place at the prison are only recorded through the memory of those few who are released. The capacity for detainees to see anything in Saydnaya is highly restricted as they are mostly kept in darkness, blindfolded or made to cover their eyes. As a result, prisoners develop an acute sensitivity to sound.

During the interviews with Saydnaya survivors Abu Hamdan used BBC and Warner Brothers Sound Effects Libraries, as well as encouraging the mouthing-out of sounds and the use of test-tones, to gain insight into the actions taking place inside the prison. Unsatisfied by the imprecision of the sound effects used for feature film and television, Abu Hamdan has since amassed his own sound effects library, specific to the investigation of earwitness testimony.

For his exhibition at Chisenhale Gallery Abu Hamdan presents this expanded library of objects for the first time. *Earwitness Inventory* (2018) is comprised of 95 custom designed and sourced objects all derived from legal cases in which sonic evidence is contested and acoustic memories need to be retrieved. Tuning into earwitnesses descriptions, such as a building collapsing sounding “like popcorn” or a gunshot sounding “like somebody dropping a rack of trays,” Abu Hamdan’s new installation reflects on how the experience and memory of acoustic violence is connected to the production of sound effects.

Alongside this installation, which includes pinecones, cannelloni pasta, unwound video tape, a selection of shoes and a series of customised door instruments, is a new animated text work that further reveals Abu Hamdan’s acoustic investigation into Saydnaya, as well as earwitness testimonies from legal cases across the world. Central to the exhibition, and surrounded by this

collection of objects is a contained listening room hosting the audio work *Saydnaya (the missing 19db)* (2017). In this work Abu Hamdan oscillates between listening to the testimony of former detainees and listening to their reenacted whispers as a form of sonic evidence in itself.

Both installations presented as part of Abu Hamdan's new exhibition explore what can emerge from audio-focused investigations, examining the role of artifice, illusion and creative labour in the construction of evidence and the specific truth that artists, and artwork, can produce. *Earwitness Theatre* comments on the processes of reconstruction, addressing the complexity of memory and language, and the urgency of human rights and advocacy. What will emerge through this process is a body of work that testifies to the threshold of an experience – where sounds are remembered as images, where objects have unexpected echoes, and where silence becomes an entire language.

As part of this new body of work, Abu Hamdan will also present his expanded video installation *Walled Unwalled* (2018) and new performance *After SFX* (2018), at Tate Modern, London from 1 October to 7 October 2018 (performance on 4 October). The sounds, voices and texts that comprise the performance are derived from objects included in *Earwitness Inventory*, giving audiences the opportunity to see and hear the project in its entirety across the two galleries.

As part of the commissioning process, a series of discursive events have been programmed in collaboration with Abu Hamdan and run throughout his exhibition, and contribute to the organisation's *Engagement Programme*. Abu Hamdan's exhibition continues Chisenhale Gallery's programme for 2018, which includes major new commissions by artists Lydia Ourahmane, Paul Maheke and Banu Cennetoğlu. Through his work, Abu Hamdan raises questions concerning how history is constructed in order to examine the production, distribution and consumption of knowledge, themes that recur throughout Chisenhale Gallery's programme for 2018.

### *Biography:*

Lawrence Abu Hamdan (b. 1985, Amman, Jordan) lives and works in Beirut, Lebanon. Recent solo exhibitions include: *Hammer Projects: Lawrence Abu Hamdan*, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (2018); Maureen Paley, London (2017); *Earshot*, Portikus, Frankfurt (2016); *Taqiyya*, Kunsthalle St. Gallen (2015); *Tape Echo*, part of *Positions*, Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven (2014); *Aural Contract: The Freedom of Speech Itself*, The Showroom, London (2012). Selected group exhibitions include *Sharjah Biennial 13*, Sharjah; *Strange Attractor*, Ballroom Marfa, Texas (all 2017); 9th Liverpool Biennial, Liverpool; (all 2016); *British Art Show 8*, Hayward Gallery, London and touring; *Surround Audience*, New Museum Triennial, New York (both 2015). Abu Hamdan was the recipient of the

Abraaj Group Prize and the Baloise Art Prize (both 2018).

*Earwitness Theatre* is commissioned and produced by Chisenhale Gallery in partnership with: Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art, Rotterdam; Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis; and Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane and it will be presented at the partner venues throughout 2019.

Lead supporters of Lawrence Abu Hamdan's exhibition at Chisenhale Gallery's are: Shane Akeroyd; and The London Community Foundation and Cockayne – Grants for the Arts.

Lawrence Abu Hamdan's exhibition at Chisenhale Gallery is also supported by: The Henry Moore Foundation; and Muriel and Freddy Salem, Cranford Collection. With additional support from Mark Hix and HIX Restaurants and the Lawrence Abu Hamdan Supporters Circle. With thanks to Maureen Paley, London.

*Saydnaya (the missing 19db)* (2017) was commissioned by Sharjah Art Foundation.

Chisenhale Gallery's *Commissions Programme* 2017–19 is supported by the LUMA Foundation.

Chisenhale Gallery's *Curatorial Trainee Programme* 2016–18 is supported by Sirine and Ahmad Abu Ghazaleh.

Chisenhale Gallery's *Engagement Programme* 2018 is supported by the *Engagement Programme Supporters Circle*.

*(This document was automatically generated by Contemporary Art Library.)*