



Iraq Initiative Conference
Chatham House, London
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RE-PLAY

Re-Play is a video art exhibition featuring artists from Iraq and the Iraqi diaspora. The distinction between these two groups is essential to highlight Iraq's chronic and persistent issues.

Artists based in Iraq have lived in a fast-changing landscape of instability and displacement, violence, religious extremism in tandem with political changes and erratic freedom of speech within the boundaries of a weakened dysfunctional state and extreme climate change.

Iraqi artists in the diaspora cover several generations of Iraqis who have been leaving Iraq since the 1980s in the wake of the totalitarian rule of the Saddam regime and the several wars that accompanied this period, starting with the Iran-Iraq War. They have grappled with local issues alongside dislocation, alienation, disconnection and nostalgia stemming from exile and displacement.

Both groups share universal themes related to sociopolitical issues of freedom of expression and human rights, as well as the impact of war and violence since 2003. The ISIS onslaught has also generated a specific genre of art focused on displacement and genocide.

The artists featured in this exhibition, spanning multiple generations both within Iraq and in the Iraqi diaspora, use their work to grapple with complex notions of Iraqi identity through the thematic lenses of heritage, exile, disconnection, freedom of expression, and other persistent issues explored in this show.

Walid Siti (b. 1949) in his work, *To The Unknown Architect*, 2022, 13' min, explores the spiral minaret of Samarra, which has been a central point of inspiration for the artists' one work and a nostalgic exercise of the artist's personal journey in Iraq.



Sadik al Fraji's (b. 1960) *Those Houses Behind the Army Canal*, 2021, 8' min, is an film animation is both an evocation of his childhood in Baghdad's biggest slum, Madinat al Thawra then, known as Sadr City today as well as an sociocultural glimpse a tumultuous period of Baghdad's history in the 1960s.

Aymen al Ameri's (b. 1995) *Tuk Tuk*, 2024, 9' min is year long account of the October 2019 Uprising in Tahrir Square, Baghdad. The film focuses on specific central figures: a doctor treating the wounded, a cook feeding the protestors, and social media activists documenting the protests. The protagonist is the Tuktuk, which became a symbol of the uprising against the state.

Travels in Assyria part 1, (Khorsabad) (2019), 15.36' min is a multiyear project of Akam Shex Hadi (b. 1985) commissioned by Ruya Foundation that interrogates the meaning of identity through heritage. Filmed at the Khorsabad Wing at the Louvre Museum in Paris and at the Baharka refugee camp near Khorsabad in Iraq, the protagonist children reflect a fragmented Iraqi reality

Fatima Jawdat (b.1993)'s film *Nippur*, 3.15' min is a performative film of the artist in the role of a Sumerian queen watching society disintegrate from her dilapidated throne in Nippur, an ancient Sumerian city. The queen stands in a state of collapse. She represents the spirit of the age and its struggle between a great history and a present

Both the films of artists Sherko Abbas (b. 1975) and Akeel Khreif (b. 1972) respectively address the environment and climate change in Iraq as part of a large project commissioned by Ruya Foundation. *Encounters on the Tigris*, 2022, 45' min, is the work by Sherko Abbas It follows a journey taken by artist in 2022, along the ancient Tigris River, in search of previously undocumented oral traditions and the ecological knowledge they hold. Akeel Khreif's *In Search of the Marshes; Diaries from an ecosystem in crisis* is a monthly journey to the marshlands spanning a year where the artist documents the fragility of this ecosystem by using his body as a barometer for climate change.

Curated by Tamara Chalabi, PhD.