



Imagine you have never been to a museum. You have no expectations about what art is, how it should be hung, written about, or how you might react to it. With this in mind, look around Mathaf's project space and think of it as a free zone absolved of any expectations of what should happen in medium sized rectangular room a contemporary art museum.

As a vessel for ideas and creative processes going somewhere, somehow, it could house anything. Or nothing. This container lives within a larger collection of tessellating spaces of Mathaf and beyond that, the Qatar Museum Authority. Within these structures are layers upon layers of people and spaces—physical, contextual, external, administrative, shared, core, and so on—working to define what the first modern and contemporary art museum in Doha can be and in turn, the tone of art in the region today. Without ties to existing contemporary art structures or institutions, Mathaf faces a clean slate. It can develop in ways that speak to local and global conversations and ideas about art, society, community, and politics. AIDowayan's collaboration with Mathaf's Project Space (1) is key within this growing web of experiences and learning about the capacity of art in this region.

Just as the Project Space experiments with alternative ways of producing knowledge and presenting today's art, AIDowayan, through collaboration and discussion, is doing something similar with her own work in the space. Shared activities and observations—about the subject at hand and her means of executing the project—move fluidly across and through people and places in Mathaf and further afield, in ways that an exhibition alone cannot.

AIDowayan's collaborations with groups of women in many of her recent works are indicative of her commitment to creating space for discussion about Saudi Arabia's subordinate positioning of women in society. While the work focuses on present concerns—Crash, for example, is quite "about" the increasingly overlooked saturation of the media's response to the phenomenon of car crashes in which female teachers are tragically killed—wider critical considerations are raised about the posterity of protectionist traditions over women.

As a female artist from Saudi Arabia, AIDowayan has acquired a celebrated position as an artist engaged in feminist activities. While gender politics are central, her conceptual practice demonstrates a commitment to enabling the confrontation of painful, and emotive socio-political and economic concerns that stretch beyond the concerns of only women. AIDowayan and the women with whom she works collectively push against prevailing gender inequalities in the political, economic and cultural hierarchies of the middle east and internationally. The overwhelming responses from women who wish to participate in her work is evidence of the frustrations of their shared experiences and the incessant desire to move beyond this. Looking to the past and the future tangentially, collective vocal and visual responses articulate resistance to the process of active forgetting—the undeterred notion that it is acceptable to wipe Saudi's collective memory of women's presence in society.

Extensive research, including conversations, interviews, and workshops group have taken place in the production of previous works, AIDowayan's research material has been contained or concealed in the final object. These works often take the form of photographs, as in *If I Forget You Don't Forget Me*, 2012 or an ethereal installation of fiberglass doves in *Suspended Together*, 2011.(2) But in *Crash* the process of research is the work itself. Ordered and analyzed, there is a pragmatism to the narrative presentation of the materials in the space; a huge copy of the first geological map of Saudi Arabia is pinned to exposed sheetrock panels with thumb tacks, visually setting the terrain in which these accidents are happening; duck tape sticks print-outs of reportage from Saudi newspapers on the car crashes published between 2006–2013 on the walls with statistics drawn from these written alongside by hand; and a large table sits in the middle of the room poised for action, chairs pulled slightly away from the table's edge invite one to sit and browse reference books left on the table. The somewhat utilitarian treatment of the research avoids aestheticization. Instead there is a conscious meditation on the notion of content and knowledge production as artistic practice can be, pushing the meaning of what the art "object" actually is.

Yet within the reams of paper and statistics lies a magnitude of unfathomable and unspoken suffering; the tragic loss of mothers, wives, and daughters too early in their lives, each leaving so many behind. On the walls the raw pragmatic data dissolves into documentation of performed, spoken responses on monitors to the extreme heartbreak and sorrow of the car accidents and the fact that the identity of these lost women will remain perpetually anonymous. The most visceral of these are two recordings of performances by Saudi and Qatari students studying in Doha invited to participate in the project during the installation process. A young woman wearing an Abaya and veil stares intently through the camera. Speaking cautiously but with precision, they deliver improvised monologues of an imaginary female teacher who suffered at the fate of such untimely fate. Progressing through to the furthest side of the room from this point to the project's conclusion one is confronted with two large black and white photographs, pixelated details of crash site images enlarged to the point of distortion, just a few of hundreds of similar images found online. Resolutely taking issue with the devastating void of communication around the identity of these women in mainstream Saudi media and the proliferation of such horrific images, AIDowayan is experimenting with the re-articulation of language and visual communication about the issue.

The discursive nature of AIDowayan's project is exemplary of her commitment to education—a characteristic of her own personality and of her work. The project space has become a meeting place in which the research material is collectively navigated through recorded interviews with professors and intellectuals located in Doha, working in the fields of journalism, feminism and literature. So far these include conversations with Dr. Hatoun Al Farsi, a feminist Saudi professor now teaching at Qatar University, and Riazat Butt, a journalist for Al Jazeera online. A meeting with writer Dr. Ahmed Abdul Malik during the Project Space opening saw a conversation between the writer and artist transpose into an impromptu reading of a story by the writer. It will be a privilege for a future iteration of this newsletter to print Dr. Malik's response to the project and his meeting with AIDowayan, a short story written in the voice of a women, his trademark style.

This project has situated AIDowayan's within an expansive international conversation about research processes as artistic practice. Many great words and theorization on this area have been written and exhibitions made, not least the expansive Documenta 13, presented in 2012 in Kassel, Germany (d13.documenta.de/). A text by Simon Sheikh from 2009 is also useful in mapping the analogous terrain of the subject (www.artandresearch.org.uk/v2n2/sheikh.html). Within this context AIDowayan's practice and this project in particular offers a crucial critical statement on the way art can initiate self-reflexive questioning which is essential in a place such as Doha as it develops its personality within the local and global contemporary art context.

This is the first of three newsletters produced as part of Manal AIDowayan's *Crash* at Mathaf's Project Space. This iteration provides updates on events that have taken place as part of the project to date. In addition to the aforementioned short story by Dr. Ahmed Abdul Malik and images, this newsletter see's contributions from artist and curator Areej Kaoud with a meditative text in response to *Crash*, while Layan Abdul Shakoor shares her experience of performing the role of a Saudi teacher in one of the videos on view in the project space.

– Laura Barlow

Crash newsletter is edited and designed by Manal AIDowayan and the project Curator, Laura Barlow.

- (1) Mathaf's Project Space was established in 2013 and is dedicated to emerging artists and curatorial practices.
- (2) *Suspended Together*, Mathaf Collection.

A Fateful Encounter

Acting in Manal's exhibit *Crash* was the result of a fateful encounter. I was visiting Mathaf with a friend and then stumbled upon the exhibit, which was still in progress back then. We spoke, and as Manal was explaining her ideas and inspirations for *Crash*, I was thoroughly impressed. Here I was, speaking to a fellow Saudi Arabian—no, scratch that, a female Saudi Arabian artist, who was passionately driven by the less than favorable aspects of our society. She was turning bland numbers and graphs that tell of ugly stories into one beautiful installation, as strange yet charming as it was.

In a spontaneous and unexpected turn of events, I donned an Abaya, wore the veil, and prepared myself to personify the numbers and facts about one of the car accidents. I was completely distraught at first. How could I retell the story of a mother whose children yearn for until today? How can I be the daughter whose parents loved, cared for, and cherished only to unjustly lose her to another's careless mistake? As all these thoughts were racing in my mind in a hurricane of emotions, I wove a story using the threads I had already known. They were the familiar threads of Mecca's culture and the precious threads of my family's love for me. And that was how I came to improvise the role of a grade school teacher whose life was tragically and unexpectedly lost on yet another dangerous weekday commute to work.

I wish I could say that I performed well, but I still believe that any performance of mine, no matter how improvised or rehearsed, will pale in comparison to this tragic accident. At least I gave a story—although fictitious—to the bland numbers, statistics, and facts that have made us so apathetic to the loss of life.

– Layan Abdul Shakoor



Dr. Ahmed Abdul Malik in conversation with Manal AlDowayan, January 2014

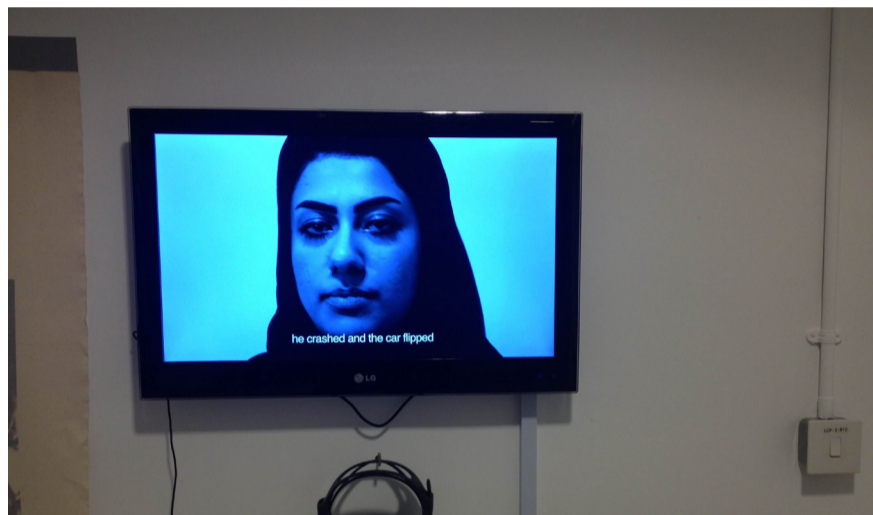


Image of the interpreted performance recorded in the project space for Manal AlDowayan's *Crash*



Dr. Hatoun Al Farsi in conversation with Manal AlDowayan, still from video, January 2014



Manal AlDowayan, *Crash*, installation view, January 2014



Dr. Erin Amann Holiday-Karre writing in the project space

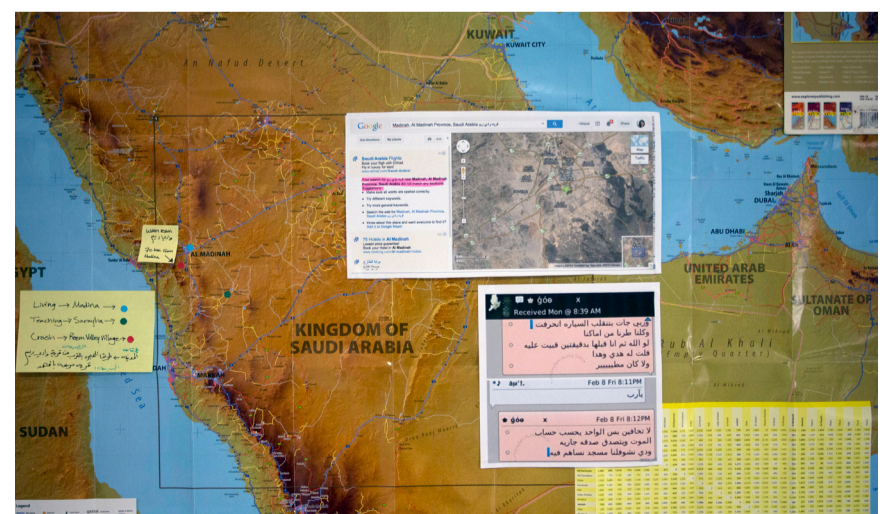
Accidents per 100 teachers	6.2	حادث لكل مائة معلمة
Accidents per city:		نسبة الحوادث حسب المدينة
Riyadh	17.5%	الرياض
Asir	14.2%	عسير
Mekkah	13.3%	مكة المكرمة
Baha	7.2%	البحر
Eastern Province	3.3%	المنطقة الشرقية
Hail	2.5%	حائل
Percent of incorrect car check	56%	نسبة فحص السيارة الخاطئة
Percent of unchecked cars	80%	نسبة السيارات التي لم يتم فحصها
Amount teacher pays to driver	1200 se 1500 se	معدل ما تدفعه المعلمة للسائق
Average teacher salary	5000 SR	معدل رواتب المعلمة
Allocated transport allowance	600 SR	معدل رواتب مواصلات
Teachers who travel over 80km	35%	معلمات يتنقلن فوق 80 كم
Transport vehicles over 10 years old	17%	سيارات نقل فوق 10 سنوات
Tires of transport vehicles over 4 years old	20%	إطارات سيارات نقل فوق 4 سنوات

Accident statistics written on the wall

Crash Motion

There are details and aspects of the everyday that gain value due to their repetition. These repetitive actions contribute to their active meaning, and to the human body producing this activity. These details are developed from being a carer, to being part of a family, a working woman in support of a working man or a developing family. These actions include teeth brushing, getting dressed, kisses on the forehead, meal preparation; calculating details of the day that construct its intentions, its level of activity and the psychological distance from home. In case of an accident, the impossibility of being present produces a tension, a kind of immobility. A daydream of possibilities to care for those one supports. Within that daydream the imagination of the accident becomes more vivid and aggressive, causing the vision to blur. This state by consequence projects incidents in the present reality to seemingly become more abrupt even if they are not. Between the state of being absent from the accident's time and place, and the state of aggressive imagination, there is a tension proliferating, absorbing one's focus causing one's level of awareness to increase or decrease. This is the fragile moment where an accident takes place to the carer, thus releasing all collected tensions into a crash.

– Areej Kaoud, Studio Manager @ Manal AlDowayan



Map and research detail, *Crash*, Manal AlDowayan, Mathaf Project Space, January 2014