



## ***Histories of Now: Art, Digital Media, & Contemporary Social Movements***

A symposium in conjunction with the Museum School exhibition [\*Histories of Now: Six Artists from Cairo\*](#) and co-organized by [metaLAB\(at\)Harvard](#) and the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

**March 9, 2012, 1 – 5:30 PM**

Alfond Auditorium, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Reception to follow: Grossman Gallery & Anderson Auditorium, SMFA, Boston, 5:30 – 7 PM

### Overview:

Organized by the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, ***Histories of Now: Six Artists from Cairo*** brings together work by some of the most inspiring and influential video and new-media artists working in Egypt today, including a multi-channel video installation by the late Ahmed Basiony, curated by Shady El Noshokaty for the Egyptian Pavilion of the 54th Venice Biennale. The exhibition provides a remarkable occasion to consider the consequences of the art and digital media production that is currently arising in the midst of social movements globally.

In connection with the exhibition, this symposium brings together artists, curators, media and culture makers, designers, activists, and scholars to share and develop vocabularies, research methods, preliminary conclusions, and future strategies, for understanding, and writing the Now and its multiple histories.

The conference is organized around three nodal points, forming an intersection of questions about contemporary art, digital media, and processes of social transformation, combining a global view with special attention to the two cities engaged by the exhibition, Cairo and Boston. The conversations will be punctuated and enlivened with audio/visual texts – some from the exhibition, others created for the symposium – and convened as roundtable discussions, with time for questions from in-person and virtual audiences.

## SYMPOSIUM SCHEDULE:

1 PM Welcome & comments: Chris Bratton, President, SMFA

1:15 - 2:30 PM I. *The Contested Present*

Discussants: **Sherief Gaber, Maryam Monalisa Gharavi, Nate Harrison & Mary Ellen Strom**

Moderator: **Matthew Battles**

It is widely acknowledged that we are in a moment of global social transformation. This is a moment in which experiences of the world and modes of representing that world are changing. From actual physical libraries in places of protest to mobile citizen journalism to architecturally-scaled imaging projections to remote-controlled quadcopter drones, participants and allies of social movements are finding new ways to gather, relay, and interpret information about the transformations underway. Often, these strategies are produced under urgent and temporary conditions with no centralized message or medium. There are multiple and contested experiences and representations. What currents of meaning are flowing through global audio-visual circuits? What cultural visions are embodied through emergent social protest movements? How do contemporary art and digital media makers work variously to negate, sharpen, or resolve contradictions?

2:45 – 4 PM II. *Condense/Disperse*

Discussants: **Beth Coleman, Shady El-Noshokaty, & The Occupy Boston Media Working Group**

Moderator: **Evan Garza**

In February 2011, protesters dispersed word across their networks in Cairo and beyond – by friend, family, neighborhood, and through globally-connected electronic media – to take the uprising to the president’s door. On the 11th, people made their way in twos and threes to the Heliopolis Palace, condensing in the thousands at the palace – an instance of a pattern of condensation and dispersal through which recent protest movements have expressed themselves in space and in network effects. What are people condensing around, in digital and non-digital spaces? How are these condensations being evoked? What are the forms of dispersal, strategic or reactive? How are individual artists and mediamakers negotiating these movements? What new condensations and dispersals do artists and mediamakers initiate? How does the work of artists and digital media makers reflect, produce or problematize the claims of contemporary social movements worldwide?

4:15 – 5:30 PM      III. *Future Tellings*

Discussants: **Ahmed Abdalla, Diana Coryat, Chris Faraone, John Ford, & Moataz Nasr**

Moderator: **Dalida María Benfield**

Movements both attract and produce storytellers: ordinary people, bloggers, tweeters, Occupy librarians, independent filmmakers, and witness-participants, all breaking into storytelling in their own distinctive ways. What kinds of storytelling practices are emerging from movements to critique the present and project equitable futures? What are their new forms and routes of exchange? How do they embody new theories of justice and provoke visions of thriving, connected communities and societies? To what extent do they help justice, community, and global awareness to take root? How do stories travel from place to place, and what new forms does connected global culture take as a result?

5:30 - 7 PM              Reception at Grossman Gallery & Anderson Auditorium,  
School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

#### ABOUT THE PARTICIPANTS:

**Ahmed Abdalla** is an artist from Egypt and an alumnus of the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston and Tufts University. His work has been exhibited in the United States at deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum, the Fuller Museum, Elias Fine Art, Boston, and the CUE Foundation, NY, and internationally at the 10th International Biennial at Taipei Fine Arts Museum, Taiwan, and group and solo exhibitions in the Netherlands, Vienna, and Museum of Contemporary art, Beijing. He has received numerous grants and awards, including a Joan Mitchell Foundation Grant in New York and the Berkshire Taconic Foundation. Abdalla is the co-curator of the Museum School exhibition *Histories of Now: Six Artists from Cairo*.

**Dr. Beth Coleman** believes in the power of storytelling to transform the world. She works with new technology and art to create transmedia forms of engagement. She is the director of City as Platform, Amsterdam, a Faculty Fellow at Berkman Center for Internet & Society, Harvard University, as well as a professor at the Institute of Network Cultures, Hogeschool van Amsterdam. Since 2005, Coleman has been a professor of comparative media studies and the primary investigator of the Pervasive Media lab at MIT. As an artist, she has a history of international exhibition including venues such as the Whitney Museum of American Art, New Museum of Contemporary Art, and Musée d'Art moderne Paris. She is the co-

founder of SoundLab Cultural Alchemy, an internationally acclaimed multimedia performance platform. Her book *Hello Avatar* is published by the MIT Press (2011).

**Diana Coryat** is a communications scholar, cultural worker, and consultant in community arts and culture. She is currently pursuing a Ph.D. at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, focusing on the role of movement-allied art and artists in protest and social movements in the U.S. and Latin America. Coryat is the founder of Global Action Project, a NYC-based media arts organization that works with young people most affected by injustice to build community power, cultural expression, and political change. In 2007, she was awarded a Fulbright to teach a course on youth, media and social movements in Cali, Colombia, at La Escuela de Comunicación Social, La Universidad del Valle, and she has conducted research and collaborated with media collectives in Colombia, Cuba, and Venezuela.

**Shady El Noshokaty** is an Egyptian-born artist and educator on the faculty of Hellwan University and American University, Cairo. Based in Cairo, El Noshokaty works in a variety of media and exhibits internationally. His recent exhibitions include *Africa Remix - Contemporary Art of a Continent*, Museum Kunstpalast, Düsseldorf (2004); Hayward Gallery, London (2005); Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris (2005); Mori Art Museum, Tokyo (2006); and Johannesburg Art Gallery (2007). In 1999, El Noshokaty's work represented Egypt at the 48th Venice Biennale, and in 2011 he was the curator for the Egyptian Pavilion of the 54th Venice Biennale, presenting work by the martyred Ahmed Basiony. His work is currently on view in the Museum School exhibition *Histories of Now: Six Artists from Cairo*.

Raised in blue collar Queens and educated at a white collar prep school and private college, **Chris Faraone** is the hip-hop generation's answer to legions of rock and jazz writers who expanded their repertoires to address pressing political and social issues. After covering rap music and culture for a decade - for everyone from *SPIN* to the *Boston Herald* - Faraone took a staff writer job at *The Boston Phoenix* in 2008, and has since won a number of regional and national awards for feature writing and investigative reporting. Starting in September 2011, he has extensively covered the Occupy Wall Street movement in more than a dozen cities across the United States, and is the author of the book, *99 Nights with the 99 Percent: Dispatches from the First Three Months of the Occupy Revolution*, published in February 2012.

**John Ford** set up and curated the Audre Lorde to Howard Zinn Library at the Occupy Boston encampment at Dewey Square, and is currently working on a book of his experience within the occupy movement.

**Sherief Gaber** is a member of the Mosireen Collective. Mosireen is a non-profit media collective born out of the explosion of citizen journalism and cultural activism in Egypt during the revolution.

**Maryam Monalisa Gharavi** has contributed critical writing and poetry to various publications including *Los Angeles Review of Books*, *Qarrtsiluni*, *Triple Canopy*, *Dark Matter*, and *Social Text*. Her films have screened at Townhouse Gallery of Contemporary Art, Harvard Film Archive, Pacific Film Archive, among others. She is a doctoral candidate in Comparative Literature and Film and Visual Studies at Harvard University and the author of the blog *South/South*, which is syndicated on the Brooklyn-based *The New Inquiry* and the Beirut-based *Al Akhbar English*.

**Nate Harrison** is an artist and writer working at the intersection of intellectual property, cultural production and the formation of creative processes in modern media. A past participant in the Art & Law Residency Program as well as the Whitney Independent Study Program, Nate is currently a PhD candidate at the University of California- San Diego working on a history of appropriation art and IP law since 1976. He is also faculty at the Museum School.

**The Occupy Boston Media Working Group** works to document and publicize the occupy movement with the intention of fostering growth therein. The Occupy Boston Media Working Group operates in several spheres: Blog, Social Media, and Website; External Press; Photo, Video and Livestream; Independent Journalism; and Calendar.

**Moataz Nasr** is a multimedia artist and curator based in Cairo, Egypt. In 2005, he founded Darb 1718, a contemporary art and culture center located in Cairo, whose mission is "a trampoline to advance the burgeoning contemporary art movement in Egypt." Nasr's international exhibitions include: the Egyptian Cultural Center in Paris (2002); the 8th Cairo Biennial (2001); the Dakar Biennial (2002); the Sharjah Biennial (2005), and *Africa Remix - Contemporary Art of a Continent*, an internationally traveling exhibition (2005-07). In 2011, Nasr's work was shown at Galleria Continua, San Gimignano, Italy, Selma Feriani Gallery and the Farm Street Church of the Immaculate Conception, London, and Jardin des Tuileries, Paris. His work is currently on view in the Museum School exhibition "*Histories of Now: Six Artists from Cairo*."

**Mary Ellen Strom**'s work takes the form of video installation and site projects. The work has been exhibited in a range of contexts, including museums, galleries, passenger trains, large-scale video projections onto industrial sites and mountain rock-faces, in empty retail stores and horse arenas. Strom's work has been exhibited at the Museum of Contemporary Art, LA, the Museum of Modern Art, NYC, The High Museum, Atlanta, The Yerba Buena Center, San Francisco, The Walker Art Center, and many other venues. Strom is represented by Alexander Gray Associates in New York, NY.

## MODERATORS:

**Matthew Battles** is a poet and writer interested in the uncanny edges of technology and the imagination. His forthcoming books include *Letter by Letter* (W. W. Norton), a sentimental and natural history of writing, and a short story collection, *The Sovereignities of Invention* (Red Lemonade). He is a research fellow with metaLAB, an academic and creative collaborative devoted to the exploration of technology in the arts and humanities, hosted by Harvard University's Berkman Center for Internet and Society.

**Dr. Dalida María Benfield** is a media artist and scholar whose work is focused on the transformative capacities of video on personal, political, and global scales. During 2011-2012, she is a Fellow at the Berkman Center for Internet and Society and Harvard University, where she is researching online videos produced by women's development collectives. She also works with the collective occupyresearch.net, and is creating a crowd-sourced critical analysis of media images of race and gender in Occupy.

**Evan J. Garza** is Exhibitions and Public Programs Coordinator for the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. He is also Editor-at-Large for *New American Paintings* and is Co-Founder of Fire Island Artist Residency, the first residency program in the United States exclusively for GLBT contemporary artists. Garza has organized several critically acclaimed exhibitions nationally and has recently been a guest lecturer at Cornell University, Georgia State University, Massachusetts College of Art & Design, and Harvard University. He is the curator of *william cordova: this one's 4U (pa' nosotros)*, currently on view at the Mills Gallery at Boston Center for the Arts (BCA).

For more information, please visit [www.smfa.edu/egypt-symposium](http://www.smfa.edu/egypt-symposium).

Co-curated by SMFA alumnus Ahmed Abdalla and SMFA Curator, Joanna Soltan, "*Histories of Now: Six Artists from Cairo*" is on view in the Grossman Gallery and Anderson Auditorium at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, through March 17, 2012.