Project name: Windows are shaking and the sky is falling

Category: Installation

Artist: Anahita Hekmat

Abstract

"Windows are shaking and the sky is falling” is a sound and video installation that seeks to transmit the experience of war. With this work, Anahita Hekmat traces her childhood memories of the Iran-Iraq armed conflict (1980-1988). By combining her own experience and the visions of others of her generation affected by the war, she draws the forms of resistance of life against the violence of the world.

This work is a sound and video installation for a scenic space. Following the timeline of the war, artist composed a sound piece. The operations and war events are used as triggers for sound elements and voices singing traditional regional songs.

The sound spatialization system is made with sounds issued from the war: bombing, explosion, shooting, siren, etc. to fill the space. Thus fragments of recordings are transformed, manipulated, stretched and deformed, to create an enveloping atmosphere.

The spatialize sound is accompanied by singers. Songs are originated from regions affected by war. Singers’ recorded voices are broadcast through speakers. Singers are performing a specific technique of traditional Persian singing. “Tahrir” is an ornamental fast melisma singing technique without text, inspired by the songs of the regions on the border with Iraq. These songs accompany and gradually cover the ambiance sounds.

Images shoot in the region of Ghasr-e-Shirin, an ancient city in the border with Iraq where the war was started, are accompanying these sounds.

Background

A war can not be narrated. It can only be remembered by snatches; traces so buried that they are no longer recognized. They come back to the surface like nothing: the sound of the siren on the first Wednesday of the month, the sound of a plane in the city center on a quiet summer afternoon, the resonance of fireworks or even imperceptible vibrations of the windows caused by the growing storm, trembling until everything breaks in a thousand pieces in memory. It is impossible to tell what the war is. The war invades our unconscious by ephemeral apparitions.

Anahita Hekmat is interested in the role of personal stories and territory in construction or interpretation of the memory. The trace of the past occupies an important place in her current work. This installation deals with the impact of war on personal and collective memories.
Detailed Description

This installation is a part of a larger project to be developed in two parts: a performative installation and an experimental documentary movie. The whole project is about the memory of war and childhood using sound as a central element.

This installation was developed during a residency in late 2018, early 2019 at Cité Internationale des Arts in Paris.

The installation is taking place in a theater with a dim light. A black video screen is the only visible element on stage. An immersive spatialize sound fill the space. The sounds are issued from the war environment.

Four singers’ recorded voices are broadcast. Singers are performing a specific technique of traditional Persian singing. "Tahrir" is an ornamental fast melisma singing technique without text, inspired by the songs of the regions on the border with Iraq. These songs accompany and gradually cover the ambiance sounds.

The performance’s duration is 23 minutes.

Videos are broadcasted by the end of the performance, showing reeds field burning and a famous historic site of Tagh-e-Bostan near Ghasr-e-Shirin, a bas-relief from Sassanid era in the mountain.
Anahita Hekmat is an Iranian new media artist. She lives and works between Paris, San Juan, Tehran and Bay Area. Her latest projects are retracing the collective, imaginary memory of war and the post-cataclysmic mnemonic landscape.

She studied at the University of Tehran, the HEAR (Haute école des arts du Rhin) of Strasbourg and Paris 8 University. From 2007 to 2010, she was a researcher at EnsadLab in Paris in the fields of interactive installations and locative media.

She has been lecturer at HEAR Strasbourg and UC Berkeley. She collaborates regularly with Beta Local, art center in Puerto Rico to co-organize Walking Seminars with Beatriz Santiago Muñoz. She is a co-founder of NMS (New Media Society), cultural NGO based in Tehran.

Her work has been shown in various art venues such as the Strasbourg MAMC, the Cité Internationale des Arts, the 104 in Paris, the Casa Blanca Museum in San Juan, the Forum of Iranian Artists and Pejman Foundation in Tehran, SOMARTS in San Francisco and film festivals such as Rotterdam, Videoformes, Oslo, Athene or Beijing Independent.