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Exhibition Guide

28 September-21 December 2019

Lawrence Abu Hamdan *Earwitness Theatre*



Opening Hours
Tuesday-Saturday 11am-6pm | First Thursday of the month 11am-9pm

Institute of Modern Art
420 Brunswick Street | Brisbane QLD 4006, Australia | ima.org.au | ima@ima.org.au

17 October	ACPA x IMA Life Drawing with Christopher Bassi
10 October	Eavesdropping: On the Politics of Listening and Being Listened to
5 October	Podcasting: Listening and Being Heard
3 October	First Thursdays: 'A New Set of Skills' with Sarah Poulgrain

Upcoming Events

Lawrence Abu Hamdan: *Earwitness Theatre*

Earwitness Theatre is the first solo exhibition in Australia by Beirut-based artist and 'private ear' **Lawrence Abu Hamdan**. Abu Hamdan examines the politics of listening across three installations, each attuned to sound used as evidence in legal contexts. The central work of the exhibition, *Earwitness Inventory* (2018), is commissioned and produced by Chisenhale Gallery, London, in partnership with the IMA; Witte de With Center, Rotterdam; and Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis, Missouri.

In 2016, Abu Hamdan was invited by Amnesty International and Forensic Architecture in London to conduct listening and sound research into the Syrian prison of Saydnaya. Interviewing former detainees, Abu Hamdan discovered they developed an acute sensitivity to sound due to forced visual deprivation during imprisonment. These are only accessible through the recorded memories of the few who have been released. Extending his audio investigations into legal cases where acoustic evidence is contested because it was captured or experienced through walls, Abu Hamdan grapples with the corruption of spatial and personal boundaries.

Earwitness Theatre attempts to capture the complexity of language and memory in the psychological, bodily, and spatial world of the earwitness—where sounds are remembered as images, where objects have unexpected instrumental echoes, and where silence becomes an entire language.

Biography

Lawrence Abu Hamdan (b.1985 Amman, Jordan) lives and works in Beirut, Lebanon. Recent solo exhibitions include: Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (2018); Tate Tanks, Tate Modern, London (2018); Portikus, Frankfurt (2016); Kunsthalle St. Gallen, Switzerland (2015); Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, Netherlands (2014); and The Showroom, London (2012). He has participated in the 58th Venice Biennale, Venice (2019); Sharjah Biennial 13 & 14, Sharjah (2019, 2017); 9th Liverpool Biennial, Liverpool (2016); 11th Gwangju Biennale, South Korea (2016); New Museum Triennial, New York (2015), and 10th Shanghai Biennale, Shanghai (2014). Other notable group exhibitions include: Ian Potter Museum of Art, Melbourne (2018); Sculpture Center, New York (2018); Moderna Museet, Stockholm (2017); Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago (2017); Museum Folkwang Essen, Germany (2016); Whitechapel Gallery, London (2016); Hayward Gallery, London (2015). Abu Hamdan was the recipient of the Abraaj Group Prize and the Baloise Art Prize (both 2018).

Abu Hamdan has been selected as a finalist for the prestigious Turner Prize for this exhibition.



CHISENHALE GALLERY



Lawrence Abu Hamdan: *Earwitness Theatre* is commissioned and produced by Chisenhale Gallery, London, in partnership with the IMA; Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art, Rotterdam; and Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis, Missouri.

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

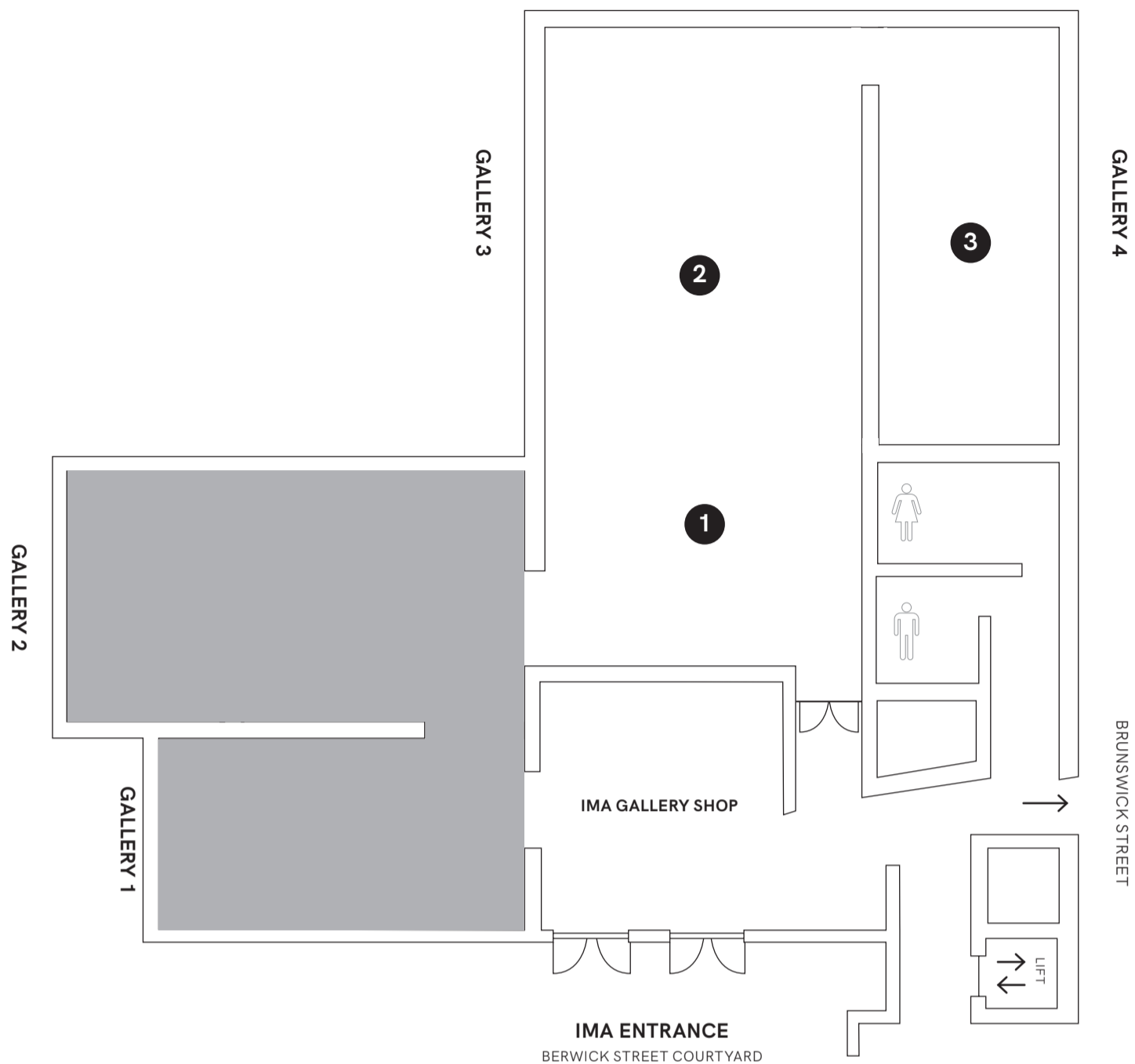
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Exhibition Map



GALLERY 3 1 *Earwitness Inventory*, 2018
95 sourced and custom designed objects/instruments, animated text, 00:29:44, looped.

2 *Saydnaya (the missing 19db)*, 2017
listening room, sound, 00:12:48, looped every 15 minutes.

The new commission *Earwitness Inventory* presents an expanded sound effects library of custom designed and sourced 'instruments' gathered by Abu Hamdan. These objects sit alongside an animated text work that reveals his global investigations into legal cases where sonic evidence, provided by 'earwitnesses', was contested. Abu Hamdan reviewed the ways people described what they heard and recognised that everyday objects can become tethered to violent acts through sonic and mnemonic associations recalled by earwitnesses. The collected objects relate to the ways a violent act was described, such as a punch sounding "like a watermelon dropping".

The soundproof listening room hosts the audio work *Saydnaya (the missing 19db)* (2017). This work oscillates between the recorded testimony of former detainees of the Syrian prison and their reenacted whispers as a form of sonic evidence in itself. In

2011, when civil war broke out in Syria, the prison was emptied of existing detainees and replaced with protestors against the Assad regime. More than 13,000 prisoners have been executed at Saydnaya since 2011; speaking aloud in Saydnaya is punishable by death. Abu Hamdan studied the levels of whispering at which detainees could speak but not be heard by guards. Comparing accounts, it became evident that the method for documenting the violence was to measure the level of silence.

GALLERY 4 3 *Walled Unwalled*, 2018
single-channel video installation, 00:20:04, looped.

Abu Hamdan's investigations into Saydnaya are extended with the presentation of his recent performance-video installation *Walled Unwalled* (2018). Here a series of projected images, a sound performance, and a monologue interweave a series of legal cases in which evidence was obtained through walls, doors, or floors. Either heard or felt at the threshold of perception, Abu Hamdan reveals the leakage of sound and difficulties in detangling it as evidence when it enters the law court.

READING LIST
A reading list of texts, books, articles and a film has been compiled by Lawrence Abu Hamdan to expand on ideas raised through the exhibition and his ongoing audio-focused investigations. Included are reports on Abu Hamdan's work with Amnesty International and Forensic Architecture, Goldsmiths, University of London into Saydnaya prison.

Amnesty International and Forensic Architecture, "About Saydnaya", Amnesty International, <https://saydnaya.amnesty.org>.

Amnesty International and Forensic Architecture, "Human Slaughterhouse, Mass Hangings and Extermination at Saydnaya Prison, Syria", Amnesty International, <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/MDE2454152017ENGLISH.PDF>.

Chisenhale Gallery, "Chisenhale Interviews: Lawrence Abu Hamdan", https://chisenhale.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Chisenhale-Interviews_Lawrence-Abu-Hamdan.pdf.

Blow Out. DVD. 1981. Directed by Brian De Palma. Criterion Collection.

N. R. Hunt, "An Acoustic Register, Tenacious Images, and Congolese Scenes of Rape and Repetition", *Cultural Anthropology* 23, no. 2 (2008): 220-53.

R. C. Morris, "The Miner's Ear", *Transition* 98: 96-115.

F. Moten, "Resistance of the Object: Aunt Hester's Scream", in *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, (2003), 1-24.

E. Weizman, "Violence at the threshold of detectability", *E-flux* 64 (2015), <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/64/60861/violence-at-the-threshold-of-detectability/>.