

Christian Palestinian Archive: A Project by Dor Guez

**Exhibition
and Programs**

**Christian Palestinian Archive:
A Project by Dor Guez**

**The James Gallery
The Graduate Center, CUNY**

**365 Fifth Avenue at 35th Street
The Graduate Center**

centerforthehumanities.org/james-gallery

Apr 8–Jun 4, 2016

Exhibition and Programs

Introduction

A golden sunset against a beach in present-day Jaffa serves as a deceptively idyllic backdrop for Dor Guez's film *Sabir* (2010). For about twenty minutes, we see shadows of individuals partaking in everyday activities against the slowly setting sun: children run home for dinner, couples hold hands on a romantic stroll, and joggers venture out for evening exercise while surfers ride the last waves before the sun's rays drop below the horizon. These shadows are more significant than the charming vignettes they appear to be at first glance. Their peaceful appearances belie a turbulent history and precarious reality of contemporary life in Israel—a discrepancy revealed by the film's narrator, a Palestinian woman named Samira Monayer. We never see Samira in the film, but we hear her story: her childhood in Jaffa and her family's expulsion in 1948 during the Palestinian exodus from land claimed by Israel (known as al-Nakba, "the catastrophe"),¹ their global dispersal to Lydd (Lod), Amman, Cyprus, Cairo, and London, and eventually, Samira's life in the new Israeli society.

The title of the film, *Sabir*, which derives from the Latin *to know*, is a Mediterranean pidgin language combining elements of French, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, Arabic, Hebrew, Turkish, and Greek. Widely spoken among seafarers and travelers between the eleventh and nineteenth centuries, it refers to a time in which the linguistic and cultural borders of the region were fluid, informed by personal experiences and connections. Guez appropriates this term to refer to many displaced Palestinians who have learned multiple languages while adapting to life in the post-1948 diaspora. Over the crash of waves against the shore, Samira—in her native Arabic—recalls her childhood, when she could walk just one hundred steps from her home to the Mediterranean, and contemplates the 1948 war and its aftermath in Hebrew. Guez, however, visually and metaphorically complicates this binary between memory and history as the setting sun over the Jaffa beach transforms the contemporary Israeli

landscape into a sea of shadows. While Guez fixes his camera to produce a static "post-card" image of the beach as a site of recreation and leisure, this image is simultaneously reframed by Samira's story, not only as a site from her past but from where she is estranged in the present.

The story of Samira Monayer is central to this presentation in the James Gallery, where it serves as an entry point to Guez's artistic practice and the inspiration for the Christian Palestinian Archive. This digital archive was founded by Guez in 2009 after he discovered a suitcase under his grandparents' bed filled with old photographs and other personal documents. Organizing these materials into albums proved insufficient, as the photographs' personal, historical, and material significance was hampered by the rigidly linear book format. Following this failed experiment, Guez's grandmother, Samira, gave him permission to scan and upload the documents. Guez's solution marked the beginning of the CPA and a turning point in his artistic practice. Much more than a digitized family album, today the CPA contains thousands of images from Christian Palestinian communities across the world. Unlike other archives, the CPA is not invested in material conservation, and all photographs are returned to their owners after being scanned. Open calls have been held since 2009 from Berlin to London to São Paulo, with a new open call to be held in New York over the course of Guez's project at The Graduate Center.

Christian Palestinians make up a very small percentage of the population in Israel-Palestine today: less than 2% of Israel, 1% of the West Bank, and .5% of the Gaza Strip.² Despite their small numbers in those territories, they represent hundreds of thousands in a diaspora stretched across the Middle East, Europe, and the Americas.³ The CPA is at its heart a participatory project, exploring stories of the community members who wish to participate. Christian Palestinians have frequently been marginalized in historical accounts of the region, and Guez's initiative addresses this omission. Yet this process of writing history against the grain

is not exclusively on the level of content for Guez. His constant but subtle refusal to fall into the easy traps of predetermined narratives and reductive identity politics is best understood through the formal tensions of his artwork, which self-reflexively push the limits of representation and authorship.

“Scanogram” is the term Guez uses for the works that result from his digital manipulation of scans from previously existing visual materials. Loose historical precedents for this process are the early twentieth century photogram experiments of László Moholy-Nagy, Man Ray, and Christian Schad, who placed existing, often mundane, objects on photosensitive paper and exposed them to light, in the process creating abstracted and frequently surreal compositions visually akin to x-rays. By producing a photograph without a camera, these artists circumvented the supposedly “natural” relationship between referent and image, forcing the viewer to question the veracity of mimetic representation. Rather than photosensitive paper, Guez uses scanning machines as his medium. Since most scanners are automatically designed to smooth aberrations and imperfections, Guez relies on scanners of different commercial qualities for different layers: each layer is selected to highlight a different aspect of the original document, such as composition, color, and physical condition. The layers are combined into one high-resolution digital image that is often printed on a large scale, magnifying the details of the original composition. Guez’s new digital image paradoxically emphasizes the original photograph’s material history as an object of historical evidence. The original document’s tears, creases, and evidence of handling over time meld with the composition to produce a work that sits on the cusp between digital and material, image and object.

In this project Guez’s focus on Christian Palestinians within Israel hones in on a unique and complex experience difficult to represent and therefore ripe for his self-reflexive aesthetic strategy: the uncanny condition of being a “present-absentee” exiled on one’s own land.⁴ *Scanogram #1* (2010) is a series of fifteen black and white

scanograms based on photographs included in the CPA. The original photographs, dating from 1938–1958, portray important events in the lives of Samira and her family before and after the declaration of the state of Israel. After Jaffa was taken by military force in 1948, the family fled about seventeen miles southeast to Lydd, a city revered in Christianity as the burial site of Saint George. The Israeli military conquered Lydd just a few months later and marched most of the Palestinian occupants to the Jordanian border. Only 1,030 out of more than 20,000 Palestinians stayed in the city, including Samira.⁵ Jewish immigrants quickly filled the abandoned houses, and the city was given the Hebrew name Lod. The remaining Palestinian population was restricted to an area, which became known as the “Lod Ghetto.” Several of Guez’s scanograms document Samira’s wedding in the Lod Ghetto on July 13, 1949, exactly one year after the invasion of the city.

Accounts of the events in Lydd in 1948 vary widely among historians as the Israeli government continues to downplay its role in the violent Palestinian exodus from Lydd and its neighboring city of Ramla.⁶ By recovering the visual and material traces of this time and place, and making them publicly available, it can be argued that Guez enters his scanograms as evidence in this ongoing debate over the historical record. This testimonial potential of the scanogram, hinted at in *Scanogram #1*, is more evident in *40 Days* (2012), a series documenting vandalism of the Christian cemetery in Lydd, where Samira’s family is buried. Samira’s husband, Jacob, snapped the original photographs to initiate a police investigation into the desecration of the graves. Failing to find those responsible for the vandalism, police returned the photographs, after which they were kept in a kitchen drawer and exposed to heat and condensation, causing the photographs to congeal to each other over time. Separating the photographs later caused them to tear at the edges, leaving ghostly streaks. The resulting scanograms document both the desecration of the Christian graves and the human remains contained therein, and the destruction

of the photographs themselves as an object of discarded evidence. Their large format, which emphasizes the physical damage of the photograph, simultaneously abstracts the original composition and draws attention to the multiple levels of real and metaphorical violence the image represents.

Guez is astutely aware that evidence can never be self-evident, but, like history, is always constructed. In other words, evidence must be made legible to systems of power in order for it to be recognized as legally admissible. These photographs were deemed insufficient by the Israeli authorities. Guez's scanograms subtly critique this circuitous system of representation and the unstable category of evidence while also acknowledging and taking part in recognition for Christian Palestinians and their stories.

(Sa)Mira (2009) is a film in which Samira's granddaughter (also named Samira) relates a moment of discrimination in the Jerusalem restaurant where she works as a waitress. After customers complain about her Arab name, Samira's boss requests she change it to Mira, a name that can "pass" as Jewish-Israeli. Samira is asked to repeat this experience many times by Guez, who remains just outside the camera's frame. Like her grandmother's story in *Sabir*, Samira's traumatic moment takes some time to be fully revealed. While at first joking about the experience, over the process of telling and re-telling her story, she becomes acutely aware of the message of this seemingly minor act of discrimination—that in order to properly assimilate into Israeli society she must conceal her ethnic identity.

The stories that Guez tells in this presentation at the James Gallery are both deeply personal and noticeably always incomplete. They remain the traces of a history of a family and a community. Always careful to avoid the easy story or the complete picture, in these works Guez continuously and self-reflexively flips representation and narrative, much in the same way he sometimes reverses photographs to show the marks and personal inscriptions usually hidden from view.

—Chelsea Haines

1. Whereas most of Israel's Jewish citizens refer to the 1948 war as the War of Independence, Palestinians refer to the war and its aftermath as the Nakba, or "catastrophe." With the establishment of the State of Israel, nearly three-quarters of a million Palestinians were exiled.
2. "FACTBOX - Christians in Israel, West Bank and Gaza," Reuters UK, May 10, 2009 (accessed February 16, 2016).
3. William Safran, "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return," *Diaspora*, Volume 1, Number 1, Spring 1991: 83–99.
4. "Present-absentee" is the official term used to designate Palestinians who remained in the country after 1948, but whose land and property were confiscated and handed over to the state. The Absentee Property Law of 1950 grants to the State of Israel the assets of those Palestinians deported from it in the 1948 war. Israel's expulsion of Palestinian civilians in 1948, the confiscation of their property, and the denial of their right to return after the war are actions forbidden by the Geneva Convention (IV) relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. Geneva, August 12, 1949, articles 49 and 53 (see <http://www.icrc.org/ihl.nsf/FULL/380?OpenDocument>, accessed 6/3/12).
5. Haim Yacobi, *The Jewish-Arab City: Spatio-Politics in a Mixed Community*. London: Routledge, 2009: 32, 61.
6. For a detailed overview of the forced Palestinian exodus in Lydd and Ramla in 1948, see Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited*. London: Cambridge University Press, 2nd edition, 2004.

Checklist

1. Dor Guez, *Scanogram #1*, 2010.

Series of manipulated readymades, archival inkjet prints, 23 1/2 x 29 1/2 inches each. (See next page for individual captions.)

2. Dor Guez, *(Sa)Mira*, 2009, video, 13:53 minutes.

3. Dor Guez, *40 Days*, 2012. Series of manipulated readymades, archival inkjet prints, 81 x 59 inches each.

4. Dor Guez, *Sabir*, 2010, video, 19:37 minutes.

5. Resource room for Christian Palestinian Archive (CPA).

4

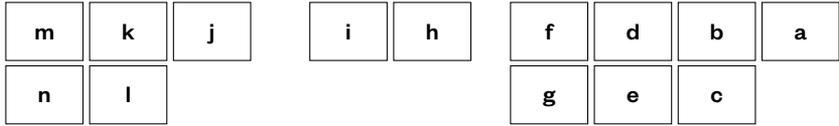
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3

1

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Captions

Dor Guez, *Scanogram #1*, 2010

a. Image 01. Georgette Monayer, Samira's older sister, with a friend holding her from behind, Jaffa, 1938.

b. Image 02. Group photo of the engineering departments for the cities of Tel Aviv and Jaffa, including Jacob, Samira's future husband, 1940.

c. Image 03. Jubran, Samira's older brother, outside and around his family's estate in Jaffa, 1941.

d. Image 04. Studio photo of Jacob, Tel Aviv, 1942.

e. Image 06. Nasser and Moneer, Samira's older brothers, Jaffa, 1947.

f. Image 07. Samira, Jaffa, early 1948.

g. Image 05. Samira (on the left) with her classmates, the Christian Orthodox Girls School, Jaffa, 1945.

h. Image 08. Samira, Lod Ghetto, a year after 1948.

i. Image 09. Samira in her wedding gown, the first Christian wedding in Lod after 1948.

j. Image 12. Moneer's wedding, Cairo, 1954.

k. Image 13. The wedding of Samira's younger sister, Jaclyn, 1957.

l. Image 11. Samira pregnant and Lod during the "Great Snow," 1950.

m. Image 14. Nasser's wedding, Lod, 1957.

n. Image 15. Georgette with her family, Cyprus, 1958.

Mon, Mar 21, 6:30–8:30pm
Lecture

The Influence of Arab Lands on Textile Arts during the Renaissance

Jennifer Ball, Art History, Brooklyn College and The Graduate Center, CUNY; Hanan Karaman Munayyer, Palestinian Heritage Foundation.

Before the Renaissance, Arab material goods—including textiles, ceramics, and glass—were more sophisticated than their European counterparts. Beginning in the 11th century, the Crusaders became aware of this region, followed by explorers and tradesmen who exchanged both objects and ideas. Over time, Europeans assimilated Arab techniques, motives and aesthetics. Through research on Palestinian textiles and embroidery, Hanan K. Munayyer surveys the history of material arts in Arab Lands. She will show photos of textiles and embroidery and a couple of costumes from her collection will be in display for closer observation. Professor Jennifer Ball will be the discussant.

C198

Co-sponsored by the Mediating the Archive Mellon Seminar in Public Engagement and Collaborative Research in the Humanities, The Ph.D. Program in Art History, and The Middle East and Middle East American Center at The Graduate Center, CUNY.

Thu, Apr 7, 6–8pm
Opening Reception

Christian Palestinian Archive: A Project by Dor Guez

Dor Guez, artist; Chelsea Haines, The Ph.D. Program in Art History, The Graduate Center, CUNY.

Artist Dor Guez founded the Christian Palestinian Archive (CPA) in 2009 after he discovered a suitcase under his grandparents' bed filled with old photographs. At the James Gallery, Guez presents a body of artworks that stem from that finding. The story of his grandmother, Samira Monayer, is mediated through a series of videos and digitally manipulated archival materials the artist calls "scanograms." This story begins with her childhood in Jaffa and expulsion in 1948 during the Palestinian exodus from land seized by Israel (known as al-Nakba, "the catastrophe"). The narrative continues with her family's dispersal to Lydd (Lod), Amman, Cyprus, Cairo, and London and, eventually, Samira's life in Israeli society. *Christian Palestinian Archive: A Project by Dor Guez* is curated by Chelsea Haines, Presidential Research Fellow, The Center for the Humanities.

The James Gallery

Co-sponsored by the Mediating the Archive Mellon Seminar in Public Engagement and Collaborative Research in the Humanities, The Middle East and Middle East American Center, and the Ph.D. Program in Art History at The Graduate Center, CUNY, and supported in part by Artis Foundation for Contemporary Art.

Fri, Apr 8, 4–6pm
Conversation

Archives and Counter-Archives: A Roundtable

Dor Guez, artist; Chelsea Haines, The Ph.D. Program in Art History The Graduate Center, CUNY; Susan Meiselas, artist; Debashree Mukherjee, Modern South Asian Studies, Columbia University.

While much scholarship has been devoted to the idea of the archive as a discursive apparatus that tracks, regulates, and disciplines bodies, scholars and artists alike are now investigating how the format of the archive can be utilized as a tool for advancing social justice and community empowerment. In recent years the “counter-archive” has developed as a term to describe a range of artistic, activist, community-based or otherwise non-official visual archives that reveal underrepresented and formerly undocumented histories. This discussion brings together artists, curators, and scholars on the occasion of *Christian Palestinian Archive: A Project by Dor Guez* in the James Gallery to discuss the role of photography and the status of the archive in understanding memory and establishing history.

C197

Co-sponsored by the Mediating the Archive Mellon Seminar in Public Engagement and Collaborative Research in the Humanities and The Ph.D. Program in Art History at The Graduate Center, CUNY.

Tue, Apr 12, 2:30–8pm
Conference

Art, Race, and Fluidity in Dominican Republic and Haiti

Diógenes Abreu, artist and writer; Herman Bennett, History, The Graduate Center, CUNY; Vladimir Cybil Charlier, artist; Abigail Lapin Dardashti, The Ph.D. Program in Art History, The Graduate Center, CUNY; Edouard Duval-Carrié, artist; Scherezade Garcia, artist; Charo Oquet, artist; Edward J. Sullivan, Art History, New York University; Judy Sund, Art History, The Graduate Center, CUNY; Jean-Marie Théoat, Geography, Université d'Etat d'Haiti; Tashima Thomas, The Ph.D. Program in Art History, Rutgers University.

This symposium explores the historical relationship of the Dominican Republic and Haiti and their diasporas, with a particular emphasis on migration, race, and the visual arts. Composed of visual artists, community members, performers, and scholars, the event addresses the past and present relationship of Haiti and the Dominican Republic from an anthropological, literary, and art historical perspective. Scholars and artists will explore the revision of Hispaniola's flawed historical narrative, which constructed Eurocentric racial hierarchies in the early 20th century in the Dominican Republic.

Martin E. Segal Theatre

Co-sponsored by the Institute for Research on the African Diaspora in the Americas and the Caribbean (IRADAC), Advanced Research Collaborative (ARC), The Ph.D. Program in Art History, and the Doctoral Students' Council.

Thu, Apr 14 & 28, May 19 & 26, 12–3pm
Open Call

Christian Palestinian Archive: Open Call

Chelsea Haines, The Ph.D. Program in Art History, The Graduate Center, CUNY.

Christian Palestinian Archive (CPA) is a growing collection of scans of archival documents, documenting the personal histories of Christian Palestinian communities worldwide. The CPA was founded in 2009 by Dor Guez, and today includes thousands of scans of historical images. Unlike other archives, the CPA is not engaged in material conservation, and all “original” photographs are sent to their owners after being scanned and added to the archive. On select Thursdays in April and May, an open call will be held in the James Gallery for members of Christian Palestinian communities to submit their photographs and materials for the archive. All sessions will be led by Chelsea Haines, curator of *Christian Palestinian Archive: A Project by Dor Guez*.

If you are unable to attend an open call but would like to contribute to the archive, please contact christianpalestinianarchive@gmail.com

The James Gallery

Co-sponsored by the Mediating the Archive Mellon Seminar in Public Engagement and Collaborative Research in the Humanities at The Graduate Center, CUNY.

Fri, Apr 15, 9am–7:30pm
Conference

Mediating the Archive: A Conference on Moving Images and Social Histories

Sara E. Bakerman, University of Southern California; Snowden Becker, University of California, Los Angeles; Swagato Chakravorty, Yale University; Clarence Elie-Rivera, photographer; David Fresko, The New School; Bobbito Garcia, Filmmaker, Natalie Greenberg, Concordia University; David Han, York University; Soyi Kim, University of Minnesota; Laura LaPlaca, Northwestern University; Geli Mademli, University of Amsterdam; Justin McKinney, independent scholar; Mike Phillips, Comparative Literature, The Graduate Center, CUNY; Guadalupe Rosales, artist; Magdalena Sagardia, Hispanic and Luso-Brazilian Literatures and Languages, The Graduate Center, CUNY; Simona Schneider, University of California, Berkeley; Travis L. Wagner, University of South Carolina; Alison Wielgus, University of Wisconsin-Superior.

Film and media objects have complex afterlives, circulating via shifting paths of exchange. Their apparent ephemerality can serve to mask their temporal and geographical situatedness, particularly in the current processes of globalization and digitization. This conference will explore different modes of archival intervention, with an eye toward excavating histories that have been obscured, forgotten, or suppressed.

C203/4202

Co-sponsored by the Cinema Studies Group, the Film Studies Certificate Program, and the Mediating the Archive Mellon Seminar for Public Engagement and Collaborative Research.

Wed, Apr 20, 6:30–8:30pm
Lecture

Defining the Present, Archiving the Past

Mitra Abbaspour, The Ph.D. Program in Art History, The Graduate Center, CUNY.

In her talk “Defining the Present, Archiving the Past,” curator and art historian Mitra Abbaspour maps the relationship between contemporary artists’ use of historic photograph archives and the history told by the pictures themselves. A doctoral candidate in Art History at The Graduate Center, CUNY, Abbaspour is completing her dissertation, a study of photograph archives dedicated to Armenian, Kurdish, and pan-Arab practices. This study considers the ways in which photograph archives call on the history of the medium to represent modernity in the Middle East.

C198

Co-sponsored by the Mediating the Archive Mellon Seminar in Public Engagement and Collaborative Research in the Humanities, The Ph.D. Program in Art History, and The Middle East and Middle East American Center at The Graduate Center, CUNY.

Wed, May 11, 6:30–8:30pm
Lecture

The Imperial Condition of Photography in Palestine: Archives, Looting, and the Figure of the Infiltrator

Ariella Azoulay, Comparative Literature and Modern Culture and Media, Brown University; Susan Buck-Morss, Political Philosophy, The Graduate Center, CUNY.

A vast treasure of books, documents, and photographs looted from Palestinians in 1948 became part of the Israeli archives established or reorganized after the founding of the Israeli state. But this did not remain a single past event. Looting has been one of the acts by which Israeli sovereignty has been performed as the ongoing project of partition of populations into distinct, differentiated groups, whereby violence among the two groups is both the pretext and the effect. Using the archive as a medium for the performance of national sovereignty, Azoulay will refute the Schmittian conceptualization of sovereignty as power that hinges on brief, singular moments of decision. Rather than the full control of the archive that Schmitt’s conceptualization implies, she will conceptualize the archive as the ongoing struggle over sovereignty that takes place in and through it. This lecture will be followed by a discussion with Professor Susan Buck-Morss.

Elebash Recital Hall

Co-sponsored by the Mediating the Archive Mellon Seminar in Public Engagement and Collaborative Research and The Ph.D. program, Art History at The Graduate Center, CUNY.

Dor Guez (b. Jerusalem) is an artist and a scholar who lives in Jaffa. Guez's work has been the subject of over twenty-five solo exhibitions, including in 2015 at the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit, CCA Tel Aviv, and the ICA London. Past solo exhibitions have been held at Artpace, San Antonio; KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin (with catalogue by DISTANZ Verlag); The Mosaic Rooms, London (with catalogue by A.M. Qattan Foundation); Rose Art Museum Boston (with catalogue by New England Press); and Tel Aviv Museum of Art. Guez's work has been in the 12th Istanbul Biennial; 3rd Moscow Biennale; Biennale Benin, Cotonou; 17th and 18th International Contemporary Art Festival, Videobrasil, São Paulo; and exhibitions at MAXXI Museum, Rome; Palais de Tokyo, Paris; and Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography, among others. Guez is Head of the Photography Department at the Bezalel School of Art and Design, Jerusalem.

This project is supported by Artis Foundation for Contemporary Art.

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Exhibition Curator: Chelsea Haines
James Gallery Curator: Katherine Carl
James Gallery Exhibitions Coordinator:
Jennifer Wilkinson
James Gallery Graduate Assistants:
Elizabeth Donato and Alexei Grinenko

Design: MTWTF

The Amie and Tony James Gallery brings artists and scholars into public dialogue on topics of mutual concern. Located in midtown Manhattan at the nexus of the academy, contemporary art, and the city, the gallery is dedicated to exhibitions as a form of advanced research embedded in the scholarly work of The Graduate Center across multiple disciplines. The gallery creates and presents artwork to the public in a variety of formats. While some exhibitions remain on view for extended contemplation, other activities such as performances, workshops, reading groups, roundtable discussion, salons and screenings have a short duration. The gallery works with scholars, students, artists and the public to explore working methods that may lie outside usual disciplinary boundaries.

The Center for Humanities encourages collaborative and creative work in the Humanities at CUNY and in the intellectual communities it serves through seminars, conferences, publications and exhibitions that inspire sustained and engaged conversation and change inside and outside the academy.

The James Gallery

Mar 21	Jennifer Ball Hanan Karaman Munayyer
Apr 7	Dor Guez Chelsea Haines
Apr 8	Dor Guez Chelsea Haines Susan Meiselas Debashree Mukherjee
Apr 12	Diógenes Abreu Herman Bennett Vladimir Cybil Charlier Abigail Lapin Dardashti Edouard Duval-Carrié Scherezade Garcia Charo Oquet Edward J. Sullivan Judy Sund Jean-Marie Théoat Tashima Thomas
Apr 14 & 28	Archive Open Call
Apr 15	Sara E. Bakerman Snowden Becker Swagato Chakravorty Clarence Elie-Rivera David Fresko Bobbito García Natalie Greenberg David Han Soyi Kim Laura LaPlaca Geli Mademli Justin McKinney Mike Phillips Guadalupe Rosales Magdalena Sagardia Simona Schneider Travis L. Wagner Alison Wielgus
Apr 20	Mitra Abbaspour
May 11	Ariella Azoulay Susan Buck-Morss
May 19 & 26	Archive Open Call