

# KAYA BEHKALAM

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Kaya Behkalam's work investigates ways of describing history and how they influence our understanding of reality.

## *Excursions in the Dark, 2011*

In *Excursions in the Dark* Behkalam combines images of post-revolutionary Cairo in 2011 with associative threads of narration. Filmed during the night curfew imposed by the Military Council after President Mubarak's resignation, the video shows the Egyptian capital from an uncustomarily deserted perspective. As people continue to protest by day on nearby Tahrir Square – this time against their transitional military rulers – the silence of these empty nocturnal streets focuses our gaze on the architecture, otherwise confined to the background of our perceptions. "Wust al-Balad", or "the heart of the country" as the centre of Cairo is colloquially known, was inspired by Paris. The French capital was reorganised in the mid-19th century by the urban planner Baron Haussmann, following the experience of the French Revolution: the narrow medieval alleys that had made it so simple to erect barricades, to the rebels' advantage, were replaced by the clear sightlines of orderly boulevards. These catered for the needs of modern traffic, but also lent themselves to easier control by the authorities.

The quiet video footage of Cairo is accompanied by apparently unconnected narrative fragments, which turn out to be dream sequences of local residents and offer insights into their desires and fears. Behkalam is making a reference to Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) and his Arcades Project, that unfinished magnum opus on the city of Paris: by linking words and images, he traces unconscious associations between collective dreamscapes, political agency and the architecture of the city.

## *Fear Filled Her Heart As, Gazing Back, She Saw (A Farewell to the Monument), 2013*

In this work Behkalam examines the allegorical figures of women chosen to symbolise European nations, such as Germania and Marianne. The title of this piece is taken from *Metamorphoses*, the work of mythology by the Roman poet Ovid. It refers to the moment when Jupiter, king of the gods, assumes the shape of a bull to carry Europa to Crete. Dancers in Cairo re enact the postures typically adopted by these allegories and, by means of improvisation, probe the conceptual, utopian and sometimes violent origins of these personifications. Constructs of European identity are resymbolised by means of this corporeal exploration.

## *The 40 Feet Trilogy, 2004/05*

*The 40 Feet Trilogy* is an essay-like portrait of the River Avon in South West England. Its elusive challenge is to write a potential biography of the river. Rather than adopting a linear narrative, Behkalam weaves together fragments of very disparate origin: the threads in this atmospheric impression of place include the river's ancient formation, the transatlantic slave trade and the frequent use of one particular bridge for suicides.

Kaya Behkalam was born in Berlin in 1978. He studied at Berlin University of the Arts and is currently pursuing a doctorate in free art at the Bauhaus University in Weimar. Among the venues to have displayed his work are Queens Museum, New York; Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin; Museo Reina Sofia, Madrid; and Kunstverein Heidelberg. *Excursions in the Dark* received the Dialogue Award at the European Media Art Festival. Behkalam is currently living and working in Egypt, where he teaches at the American University in Cairo.