

HOŠEK CONTEMPORARY

— EST. 2016 —

JESSICA FAIRFAX HIRST & ELIU ALMONTE - POELITICS OF A DESERT

Opening reception: 16th July 2022, 7 - 10 pm

Exhibition period: 14th - 23rd July 2022

There is an often-quoted story of how Marco Polo saw a rhinoceros in Sumatra and called it a unicorn because he had no frame of reference or experience with anything like a rhinoceros, but he did have a mental picture of a unicorn. He wrote that he was quite disappointed at how ugly the unicorn actually was.

Palestinian writer Raja Shehadeh describes how a similar phenomenon befalls her homeland, that many travellers have arrived for millennia from far off lands and project their own beliefs, imaginations and desires onto this piece of earth, such that *"Palestine has constantly been reinvented, with disastrous consequences for its original inhabitants"*. (Palestinian Walks)

This age-old story is now more powerful than ever. The former US ambassador to Iraq and Turkey, James Jeffrey, was asked on television a couple of days ago if President Biden's visit to Saudi Arabia was a betrayal of his campaign promises to promote human rights in the region. His reply revealed how US geopolitical interests went beyond Israelis, beyond Palestinians, even beyond almighty oil - he said that this visit was about the balance of power on the planet, the "existential threat" of Russia and China. This of course is imperialist, colonialist and all the rest.

In November of 2019 we visited Jordan in the company of our collaborator and dear friend Suzanne Saoub, who took most of the photos of our performances in the Wadi Rum desert. We crossed by land into Israel just Eliu and I, because Suzanne as a Jordanian is not permitted to enter, even though (or because) her mother's family is from there. We spent a few days in Jerusalem but left quickly because being there made me physically ill. We were only able to spend a few hours in the occupied West Bank, on a tour led by Yamen Elabed, but even this short time was more time than the vast majority of Israelis spend in their lifetimes, in part because of the apartheid system that does not permit them to enter, nor the Palestinians to leave. Eliu's video from this tour is mounted in the back room.

We spent several days in the artist village of Ein Hod, the subject of one of our videos in this exhibition. We had the coincidental experience of renting an Airbnb that was like a small museum of the early cultural history of Israel, belonging to the family of one of the original architects of what would become Israeli military and folk music.

Our exhibition "Poelitics of a Desert" is an effort to respond aesthetically and creatively to our own projections onto this piece of land, and our experience of feeling the projections of many others. As a person raised in the United States in a hybrid Jewish family, I carried my own conflicted baggage to the journey, as I discuss in the video "40 Years". We are not even trying to make objective "sense" of such a complex and tormented situation, we are merely processing our impressions and reflections through this intervention in the unique space of Hošek Contemporary.

Eliu Almonte

Eliu Almonte is an interdisciplinary artist born in 1970 in San Francisco, Dominican Republic, currently resides in Cabarete RD. He has been an independent curator of dozens of International Performance and Visual Arts festivals in the Dominican Republic. Eliu served as Curator of Visual Arts at the House of Culture of Puerto Plata 2000-2004. He embodies the dynamics of power of the global economy on a personal and geopolitical scale, putting his body where others only put their mouths.

Almonte has presented his works in dozens of exhibitions, biennials, meetings and festivals of Contemporary Art, in the Dominican Republic, Venezuela, Colombia, Brazil, Chile, Argentina, Costa Rica, Guadeloupe, Mexico, USA, Senegal, Zimbabwe, Spain, The Netherlands, Italy, Germany, Austria, South Korea, England, Northern Ireland, Norway, Luxembourg, India, Thailand and Japan.

Jessica Fairfax Hirst

Jessica Fairfax Hirst was raised in a hybrid Jewish family on the East Coast of the United States. She is a multidisciplinary artist, working in performance, video, installation and 3D collage. She considers herself a refugee from the US since 2006, having lived in Nicaragua, Spain and currently the Dominican Republic. She has a highly sensitive personal ecosystem, and endeavors to make use of her mental and physical responses as another art material.

Jessica Fairfax Hirst *"faces from an art-life-political position how capitalist culture diminishes the psychic well-being of the people who live it, at the same time that she develops a critical stance that shows alternatives to the pharmaceutical capitalist system through the configuration of personal ecosystems that allow one to live a life on a human scale."* (Lynda Avedaño Santana 2021)

She has created and presented work in Germany, Austria, Spain, France, Latvia, Serbia, Britain, Italy, Portugal, Northern Ireland, Senegal, Zimbabwe, India, Thailand, Japan, Jordan, Israel, Colombia, Ecuador, Chile, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, the Dominican Republic and the US.

Hošek Contemporary

Established by Petr Hošek in 2016, Hošek Contemporary is a gallery and art residency located on a historical cargo ship next to Fischerinsel in Mitte, Berlin. The gallery focuses primarily on site-specific pieces, performing arts and experimental sound works. During the spring and summer months, the gallery is hosting weekly improvised and experimental music installations, with local and international musicians.

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