

BIOGRAPHIES

Khadija Baker is a multidisciplinary artist who combines video, textile, sound, and performance to explore political persecution, displacement and memory. Her intimate sculptural environments breach the divide between artist, art, and public, creating active spaces of participation, exchange, and storytelling. Baker has exhibited in cultural capitals such as Montreal, New York, London, Berlin, Marseille, Beirut and Damascus. Baker was awarded the Millennium Scholarship at Concordia University in 2005 and 2006, and the George Balcany Bursary for Painting and Drawing in 2007. In 2009, Baker received the Vivacité grant for culturally diverse artists from the Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec, and a Vidéographe research and experimentation grant. Born in the Kurdish town of Amoude, Syria, Baker received her BFA and MA from the University of Damascus, before moving to Montréal 2001 and completing a BFA at Concordia University, where she is currently pursuing an MFA in Open Media.

Rachel Gorman is a performance artist working in dance theatre, video, and installation. Since receiving her PhD from the University of Toronto in 2005 with a dissertation on cultural production and class consciousness, Gorman has held a Lectureship at the Women and Gender Studies Institute of the University of Toronto; Research Fellowships at Manchester Metropolitan University and the University at Buffalo (SUNY); and a SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellowship exploring disability politics of Kurdish national liberation struggles. In 2006, Gorman premiered *The Ghost*, a dance film about Kurdish political prisoners. The Globe and Mail's Paula Citron called Gorman's 2002 anti-war production *Waking the Living* "compelling...a disturbing and riveting reality check" and described her 2004 production *Passing Dark* as a "melancholy journey... of intense sadness." Gorman created *Transit*, a gallery installation on mixed-race identity and political suspicion, in 2007; and combined performance and video to create *Pass* in 2009 and *Fall* in 2010.

front: Khadija Baker, *Home/Skin*, Sculpture, 2010



February 18 to March 16, 2011

Unravelling Empire

Khadija Baker

Curated by Rachel Gorman



Opening Reception Friday February 18, 7 - 9pm
 Performance by the Artist on Friday February 18, 7 - 7:30pm
 The performance is presented by A Space Gallery and FADO Performance Art Centre

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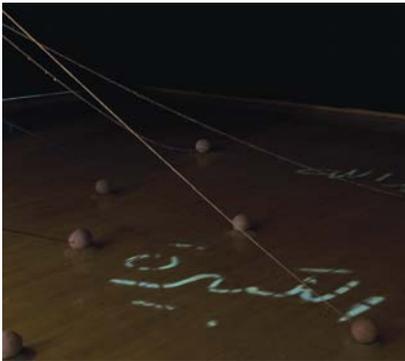






Khadija Baker's *Unravelling Empire* lays bare emotional and embodied landscapes of empire, revealing rituals of memory and loss, and the intimacy of survival and resistance.

Taking the evacuation and exile of the Kurds, and their erasure from the land as her point of departure, Baker's installation *Behind Walls* weaves together clothing, rope, clay, light, and the voices of the displaced, and invites us to participate in the re-inscription of what has been lost. Ropes and webbing evoke the tangle of imperialism and the web of military and state power connecting transnational capital and US foreign policy to local regimes. The ropes touch ground attached to hard round stones bearing the names of Kurdish villages that have been renamed by the Syrian government. Moving through the space, between the stones and fibres, we hear testimony in English, French, and Kurdish—vivid descriptions of the tangled technologies of empire—of genocide through bureaucracy, through denial of citizenship and documentation, the refusal of access to state health care and food programs. Shadow and light score the landscape as the new Arabized village names appear and fade away. These technologies of erasure find their parallel in the Judaization of Palestinian villages in Israel/Palestine, in the Turkification of Kurdish villages in Turkey, and in the Anglicization of First Nations land in Canada.



Khadija Baker, *Behind Walls*, installation, 2008

Behind Walls captures the moment in which the struggle over land is transformed into a struggle over memory, referencing the historical determinacy of linguistic and symbolic erasure. Baker's work reminds us that the difficulty of unravelling empire is dialectically related to its technologies of power.

Home is a sculptural and performative multimedia installation where the artist "explores ways of my daily life in which I try to cope with, and survive uncertainty, specifically my home's uncertainty."ⁱ Comprised of three performative and digital components, *Home/Skin*, *Equal Space*, and the *Name/Trace* video series, the work assembles sculpture spun from the artist's hair, braided ropes, and names etched in ink on ice.



Khadija Baker, *Equal Space*, performance, 2010

Baker's sculptural *Home/Skin* exposes the uncertainty of the exiled body as it becomes home to self, and to the future. The artist's hair and remnants of clothing are spun into strands and twisted into a filigreed case for her pregnant body. Spiralled ornamentation is both constraint and support composed of the history and presaging of the artist's labour. Baker's pregnancy simultaneously defies the past, and promises life in a future that has been

bounded by the historical threads of empire. Encased in the biological traces of bodies uprooted and recomposed, Baker reminds us of her separation from the earth of home in life, birth, and death. Cut off from the natural cycles of homeland, her hair, fabric, and shed skin cannot return to the soil to decompose.

Home/Skin hints at a need for the exile to grow new body parts. Like a rhinoceros horn, this hairy shell can harden and protect. The monster-hybrid is both beautiful and terrible, highlighting the tactile, affective aspects of racialized bodies "that are in some sense



Khadija Baker, *Name/Trace*, video, 2009-2010

machined together, remarkable beyond identity, visibility, and visibility."ⁱⁱ Our experience of Baker's hybridity/humanity references the refusal to see the politically, economically, and militarily displaced as human.

In her *Equal Space* performance, Baker asks the audience to listen to her voice through long ropes of her hair. As the audience, we are invited to hear her history, yet we hear her through protective braids, through the sedimentations of time. Lengths of hair—containing traces of where we have been and what we have absorbed, sign of our longevity—become protection from the gaze of empire. Set as it is within references to war, exile and uncertainty, Baker's text makes explicit the moment of affective encounter between the diasporic body and the 'hostland.' Baker resists the moment of racialization and reveals our collective implication in the web of empire.

"I used to play with clay in that garden of my grandmother's house, I played with the leaves of her tree, I ate her flowers, her roses... and when I grew up I became you, I grew in you, I moved to this place... I learned that the weapon that was used to kill my brother, it was you." – Khadija Baker, *Equal Space*

In the final component of *Home*, Baker carves in ice the names of people killed in war. Lasting the time it takes for the ice to melt, Baker's video series *Name/Trace* is a "metaphor for the time we need to recover from the trauma of losing our loved ones."ⁱⁱⁱ As the names disappear they leave their trace on the cloth underneath. Watching the names disappear becomes a modality for grieving memory itself, in a dominant cultural landscape where only the deaths of the occupying troops are reported.

— Rachel Gorman, Curator

ⁱ Artist, personal communication.

ⁱⁱ Jasbir Puar, "Queer time, queer assemblages," *Social Texts* 84-85 23(3-4): 132 (2005).

ⁱⁱⁱ Artist, personal communication.