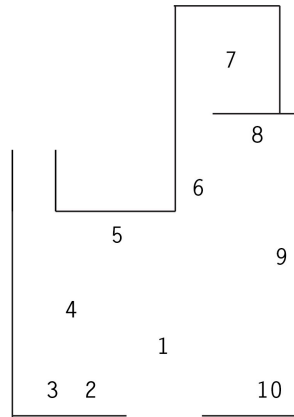


SI

The Space Between Classrooms
Architecture and Design Series: 5th Edition
Curated by Alia Farid
January 20–April 18, 2021

GROUND LEVEL



1. Abdullah Al-Mutairi

جهل
2019

Brick, cement

This brick wall by artist Abdullah Al-Mutairi (b. 1990, Kuwait) replicates an ornamental feature found amid the stark modernist architecture of Alfred Roth's school designs in Kuwait. Roth's design riffs on the traditional culture of tribal Sadu weaving through brickwork, in addition to referencing an *ibjad*, the traditional space partition in tribal tents. In Al-Mutairi's rendition, however, the pattern of the bricks is transformed to read "Jahil" (Arabic transliteration), which means "child" or "before consciousness." The period before the advent of Islam in the Arab world is referred to as *Jahileea*, a derivative word meaning "before consciousness" or "unenlightened." The implementation of mandatory schooling was one of several ways that the Kuwaiti government attempted to make its tribal population settle, thereby promoting a sedentary lifestyle over a more transient one. The work thus considers the importation of Roth's so-called expertise to Kuwait and the reduction of ancient tribal culture to mere motif. Underscoring the mutability of language, Al-Mutairi asks: who possesses knowledge and truth?

2. Alfred Roth

The School Buildings of Kuwait, 1965

23 page booklet, typescript on paper, ring binding
Courtesy of gta Archives / ETH Zurich, Alfred Roth

This is the initial report that Alfred Roth made on "the existing educational facilities with regard to future school building programmes" in Kuwait in response to his invitation by Kuwait's Ministry of Public Works to design a prototype for schools. The buildings he designed, along with replications of them, are still in use there today, yet they have been modified, adapted and altered by the local population in response to their changing needs and societal shifts over the last five decades.

3. *Credit System in Education... Why?*

Original year unknown (c. 1975), subtitles added in 2019

Found footage, 34 min 26 sec

Courtesy of Huda Abdulmughni, subtitles by Alia Farid

Filmed by a local Kuwaiti television station called KTV 2, this clip profiles the introduction of a new credit system, which was implemented in Kuwait several years after the schools designed by

Alfred Roth were built and completed. The system takes attendance into account for the first time and includes two semesters, a larger range of subjects taught and the introduction of foreign language instruction. Overall, it formally marks the adoption of a Western accreditation model.

4. ATELIER AZIZ ALQATAMI

Spring Ophthalmia 1988, 2020-2021

India ink on vellum paper, clay sourced locally in Kuwait

Aziz Alqatami (b. 1979, Kuwait) is an architect, artist and member of the art collective GCC. Through his work he presents a psychologically-charged architecture, often alluding to his own experience growing up in a rapidly transforming Arab society. This architectural drawing of a trough-like drinking fountain depicts the harshly utilitarian feature that was often added to Roth's buildings in the years following their completion. Disregarding Roth's purity of form, the drinking fountains - a necessity for a desert environment but overlooked in formal designs - were added to the constructions in increasingly haphazard and defensive fashion: their metal cups were chained down to protect from theft; large retractable hoods were added to protect from sun and dust; and new fountains were placed next to broken ones whose sinks had been adapted into waste bins. Alqatami writes: "Drinking fountains are an important element in creating a comprehensive school environment. The fountains used in public schools in Kuwait were conceived as iterative systems without consideration for methods of use. Water usage is one of the most important elements in the culture of the Arabian Peninsula and its importance lies in its scarcity. Islam ingrained the concept of the drinking fountain (*sabeeh* in Arabic, literally meaning "the path") and the quenching of thirst literally and figuratively." Demonstrating the uneasy morphing of standardized design to suit actual conditions, the work further metamorphoses into a remembered vision from childhood with the sculptural accompaniment of clay replicas of eye ointment tubes, which were issued by the government for students to use in protection against seasonal allergies. The discarded waste piles contributed to the formation of this landscape in Alqatami's memory.

5. Nuria Montiel

Wxnder Wxrds / Imprenta Móvil, 2014/2021

Monoprint with ink on rice paper, wall painting

Wxnder Wxrds by Nuria Montiel (b. 1982 Mexico) is an ever-expanding series of prints that combine visual poetry and protest to respond to urgent social and political concerns. Inspired by the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire's (1921-1997) pedagogy that connected knowledge and literacy to social change, Montiel's practice takes the form of participatory printmaking and community-based action. In 2010, in response to former Mexican president Felipe Calderón's militarization of the country and supposed war against drugs, she began utilizing the *Imprenta Móvil*, a mobile press through which collective concerns could be voiced, printed and given visibility. Inspired by the immediacy and ephemerality of flyposting, the resulting posters spin linguistic games that dart between legibility and association. Responding to current events, one of the posters, for example, is printed with the word "MUERTE," and was made in response to the 2014 Iguala mass kidnapping, in which 43 students from the Ayotzinapa Rural Teachers' College were kidnapped and disappeared. The font combines characteristics of the Bauhaus-like letterforms of Dutch graphic designer Jurriaan Schrofer with Mesoamerican inscriptions, and the grid-like forms further allude to the artist's own physical perambulation with the *Imprenta Móvil* around different urbanized neighborhoods. Along with a newly commissioned wall painting that reincorporates many of the printed phrases, Montiel's vibrant imagery melds ancient culture and the digital present, birthing disorder and creating new strands for design thought and processes.

6. Cecilia Vicuña

Caleu está soñando, 1999

Video, 12 min 9 sec

Produced by The Touchstone Center

Translation by Angelina Jaffe

6. Cecilia Vicuña

Conversation about The Thread at Play, 1999

Video, 13 min 9 sec

Produced by The Touchstone Center

Cecilia Vicuña's (b. 1948, Chile) video, *Caleu está soñando*, documents a series of workshops she began in 1995 with children at a rural school in Caleu, a mountain village in central Chile. In the indigenous Mapuche language, *caleu* means "to be transformed," a notion which Vicuña uses as the rubric for her mostly performance-based workshops that take the students out of their classrooms. By rooting the concepts of play and freedom of expression in the children's own indigenous culture, Vicuña aims to inspire the students and the community around them to re-engage with their traditions and learn from ancient sources of creativity.

7. Mohamed Bourouissa

The Whispering of Ghosts, 2018

Video, 13 min 15 sec

Co-commissioned by FACT and Liverpool Biennial

© ADAGP Mohamed Bourouissa

Courtesy of the artist and kamel mennour, Paris/London

In Mohamed Bourouissa's (b. 1978, Algeria) film *Le Murmure des fantômes (The Whispering of Ghosts)*, the artist visits the Algerian psychiatric hospital at which post-colonial theorist and philosopher Frantz Fanon once practiced. There, Fanon's former patient and one-time liberation fighter, Bourlem Mohamed, created a garden as a form of occupational therapy. Together, Bourouissa and Mohamed

discuss Fanon's radical attempts to change the punitive culture of psychiatric hospitals. The film intersperses Mohamed's recollections of being called a *Fellagha*, an Arabic word for "bandit" that was used to refer to anti-colonial militia groups in French North Africa, with the pages of a book containing the names and descriptions of the plants in his garden. Simultaneously, Bourouissa documents the creation of a garden in Liverpool, which is based on what Mohamed describes from his memory. There the artist worked with local gardeners, school pupils, teachers and artists to make the design real again. These encounters together reveal and connect the personal history of Bourlem Mohamed, the institutional history of the Blida-Joinville Hospital, the intellectual history of Frantz Fanon, and the tragic, broader history of the conflicted relations between France and its former colonies.

8. Olga Casellas, Marco Abarca
The Axis of Modern Violence Reminds, 2021
Web-based visualizations

Warning: questions refer to physical, emotional, and sexual violence.

The Axis of Modern Violence Reminds by Olga Casellas and Marco Abarca (who both live and work in Puerto Rico) is a web-based survey and visualization that shows the intersections of otherness and sameness, oppression and depression, to form a landscape. In order to complete this exercise, participants are asked the same questions on topics of sexual and gender violence that high school students were asked in the Center for Disease Control and Prevention YRBS nation-wide survey of 2019.¹ Answers are compared to respondents from high schools in Puerto Rico. Currently in its beta stage, the artists plan to add additional data sets to the website in future versions. As the artists write: "The Axis allows feeding different data sets for continuous interpretation of an ever-changing landscape as it relates to different social phenomena. What matters is your experience within the violence landscape."

9. Gala Porras-Kim
For Learning Zapotec Verbs, 2012
Wood, pencil, paper, wire, found rocks

9. Gala Porras-Kim
Notes after G. M. Cowan #1, 2012
Graphite on paper, post it, wood

9. Gala Porras-Kim
Mapping tones (all documented Zapotec dialects in Oaxaca), 2012
Graphite, ink, tape, pins, Post-it, paper, wood

9. Gala Porras-Kim
Notes after G. M. Cowan #2, 2012
Graphite on paper, post it, wood

9. Gala Porras-Kim
Whistling and Language Transfiguration, 2012
Vinyl LP record, unique cyanotype print album cover

9. Gala Porras-Kim
Notes after G. M. Cowan #3, 2012
Graphite on paper, post it, wood

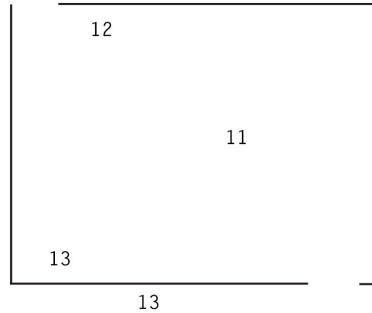
All works courtesy of the artist and Commonwealth and Council, Los Angeles

Gala Porras-Kim's (b. 1984, Colombia) ongoing project, *The Mute Object and Ancient Stories of Today*, is an object-based ethnography that follows the transmission and representation of Mesoamerican languages across the Isthmus of Tehuantepec - the land that separates the Gulf of Mexico and the Pacific Ocean, which was once a major shipping route. Porras-Kim links undeciphered samples of Isthmian script, an inaccessible written form found carved on stone artefacts along the Papaloapan River in Mexico, with the current development of a standardized dictionary of Zapotec languages in Oaxaca, one of the most linguistically diverse regions in the world. Also on display is a recording the artist has made to document one of many dialects of Zapotec, a tonal language with over fifty variants. With no Latin-script equivalent, Porras-Kim's work with Zapotec is a continuous exploration of the potential of ancient Isthmian symbols and an attempt to recodify their meaning for the present to reflect on indigenous rights and the production of knowledge.

10. Khalid al Gharaballi
The Garden of Earthly Delights, 2020
Oil on canvas

Khalid al Gharaballi's (b. 1981, Kuwait) triptych, *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, is based on stills from found cellphone video footage that depicts classmates having sex in one of the all-male public schools in Kuwait, which was originally designed by Alfred Roth. The painting foregrounds the boys' instinctive and transgressive act against the cool rationality of Roth's twentieth century European modernism. Al Gharaballi writes: "This is a departure from the optimistic, utopian visions of the post-colonial era in which these buildings were erected, and from the conventions of architectural draughtsmanship used to represent modernist buildings, which are occupied by placeholder figures in the most ideal and prescriptive way possible." In the empty, perhaps unused classroom pictured on the right, the artist features a portrait of himself in the role of an authority figure, visually but not physically present.

¹ These categories from the CDC survey notably exclude nonbinary gender identification, as well as other forms of sexual orientation.



11. Haig Aivazian and Jumana Manna
The Setting of Noon, 2019
Installation

Installed throughout the 2nd floor gallery, *The Setting of Noon* is an atmospheric scenography and performance work by Jumana Manna (b. 1987, USA) and Haig Avazian (b. 1980, Lebanon). Commissioned initially in October 2019 for the eighth edition of the triennial *Home Works Forum* at Ashkal Alwan in Beirut, its debut was suspended when political protests broke out in Lebanon that same month. The site-specific work was envisaged for a derelict office space in Karatina, a semi-industrial neighborhood in Beirut. It consists of both a mythopoetic performance by the artists, which takes form here in the narrative that the copy machine disburses, and a seemingly illogical installation of office furniture with bulbous, totemic sculptures. It begins: “You think that your back pain comes from the office, but it comes from the time humans started walking upright. Your slipped vertebrae mirror the tectonic shifts of the earth beneath you. Pain is your body, living and interacting with its surroundings. We are all but encrypted seismographs. Hold firmly, unto your gaze.” If professionalization is the upshot of modern education, this work questions whether we are actually enriched or subordinated by our activities at work.

Visitors are invited to take a text from the copy machine.

12. Cecilia Vicuña
Sabor a Mi, 1973

Printed book

Courtesy of Betty Boyd Dettre Library and Research Center, National Museum of Women in the Arts

Cecilia Vicuña’s (b. 1948, Chile) book of poems, *Sabor a Mi*, was published two months after the 1973 Chilean coup d’état, in which the democratically elected government of socialist President Salvador Allende was violently overthrown by Augusto Pinochet’s military junta. Here, the featured poem, *NUEVOS DISEÑOS EROTICOS PARA MUEBLES (NEW EROTIC DESIGNS FOR FURNITURE)*, is illustrated by a naked woman bent over a sofa, which extends backwards into a desk. Interweaving desire and work, furniture and flesh, in its verse the poem describes the restrictions of the civilized world and proposes new and mutable forms of interior design.

13. Oscar Murillo
Frequencies, 2013-ongoing

Ballpoint pen, fountain pen, graphite, felt tip pen, highlighter pen, permanent marker, paint, crayon, staples, natural pigments, debris and other mixed media on canvas

Courtesy of the artist and Frequencies Projects Foundation

Frequencies is an ongoing project by Oscar Murillo (b. 1986, Colombia), in collaboration with political scientist Clara Dublanc and students aged primarily 10 to 16 from schools across the globe. In 2013, Murillo began sending squares of raw canvas to selected schools in over twenty countries around the world with the sole requirement that they be affixed to desks and illustrated by students. The canvases would stay there for a year and then be re-collected by the artist. Within weeks of their arrival, children from places as disparate as South Africa and Slovenia began to draw, paint, write, and communicate, creating documents of their social and educational experiences. Selections of these canvases from students in Azerbaijan, China, Colombia, Ghana, India, Kenya, Lebanon, and New York are stacked on shelves in the 2nd floor gallery and featured in custom, desk-shaped displays in the Reading Room.

All works courtesy of the artists unless otherwise noted.