

Lovers' Wind is the first major institutional solo exhibition in Canada by Toronto-based artists Parastoo Anoushahpour, Faraz Anoushahpour, and Ryan Ferko.

Lovers' Wind and TD Programming & Engagement Assistant are made possible with Leading Support from TD Bank Group



Lovers' Wind is presented as part of *Artist First*, a Mercer Union commissioning platform. *Artist First* commissions are made possible with the generous support of Kaye & Paul Beeston, Rebecca Carbin, Joanna & Meric Gertler, Nancy McCain & Bill Morneau, Margaret McNee, David & Erica Neligan, Donna & Robert Poile, Frances & Tim Price, and Morden Yolles. Learn more mercerunion.org/support

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Mercer Union, a centre for contemporary art

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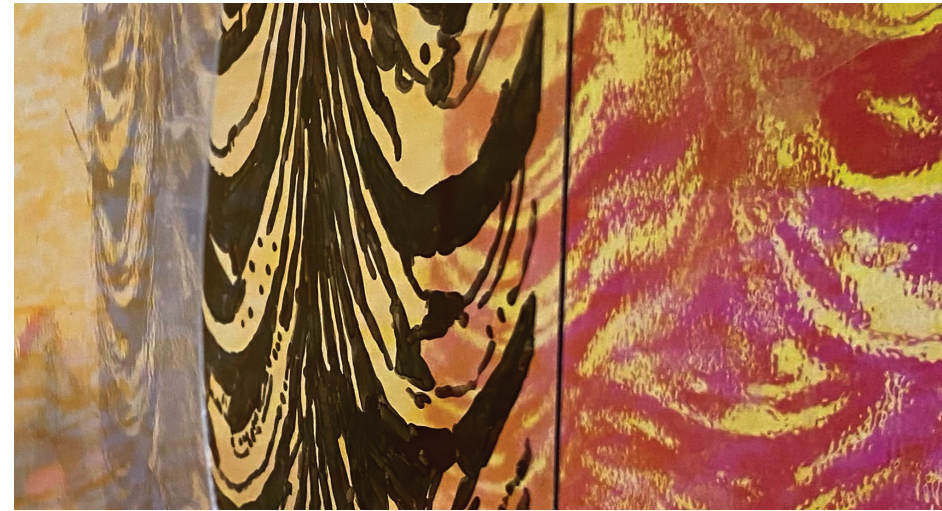
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SPACE: Sukaina Kubba | *Jealousy: Now the House is Empty*
12 January–12 April 2024

Mercer Union's SPACE billboard commission has invited artist Sukaina Kubba for its 2023–24 season for a yearlong series titled, *Jealousy*. Working with materials such as photo emulsion, plastic filament, and various sheer fabrics, *Jealousy* looks to the history of Mercer Union's building as a cinema to present three sculptural works as adverts for a fictional premiere: a new film adaptation of Alain Robbe-Grillet's 1957 novel *La Jalousie*. Read the artist's note on the second edition: *Now the House is Empty* (2024), along with an accompanying text at mercerunion.org

Sukaina Kubba is an Iraqi-born Toronto-based artist who explores narratives of cultural and material assimilation and appropriation. Kubba's work has been included in recent exhibitions at the plumb, Toronto (2023); The Next Contemporary, Toronto (2023); Art Gallery of Ontario (2019); Aga Khan Museum, Toronto (2017); Centre for Contemporary Art, Glasgow (2016); and Glasgow International (2016, 2014). She recently completed residencies at the International Studio and Curatorial Program, New York; and La Wayaka Current, Atacama Desert, Chile. Upcoming exhibitions include GTA24 at MOCA, Toronto; and a solo exhibition at Dundee Contemporary Arts, Scotland. Kubba is a sessional lecturer in Visual Studies at the University of Toronto, and previously served as curator and lecturer at Glasgow School of Art (2013–2018).

SPACE invites one artist to produce a yearlong series of images for a public-facing billboard on the east façade of Mercer Union.

Image: Production still, Sukaina Kubba, *Jealousy*, 2023. Courtesy the artist.

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BIOGRAPHIES

Parastoo Anoushahpour, Faraz Anoushahpour, and Ryan Ferko work at the intersection of speculation, historical fiction, and documentation. Their collaborative filmmaking practice explores tensions and uncertainties within images, bringing to the surface critical perspectives on history and collective memory.

In 2021, Mercer Union invited the artists to develop a new body of work for their first major institutional solo exhibition in Canada. Filmed between Iran, Tunisia, and Canada, their commissioned project *Lovers' Wind*, considers the materiality of images in the construction of a national identity. The project takes its starting point from the helicopter crash that killed French filmmaker Albert Lamorisse in 1970, during the production of a state-funded documentary about Iran.

Mercer Union's collaboration with Parastoo, Faraz and Ryan emerges from our long-held commitment to commissioning new work, and creating milestone opportunities for artists to bring their visions to fruition in Toronto. Through our commissioning platform *Artist First*, we invest in the lifecycle of a project from conception to realization, cultivating discovery, risk-taking, and artistic development through long-term support and dialogue. To learn more, visit mercerunion.org/support



Parastoo Anoushahpour, Faraz Anoushahpour, and Ryan Ferko have worked in collaboration since 2013. Their shared practice explores the tension of multiple subjectivities as a strategy to address the power inherent in narrative structures. Foregrounding the idea of place, their work seeks to both decode their surroundings and trouble the production of images through speculative narration and dialectical imagery. Shifting between gallery and cinema contexts, recent projects have been presented at MoMA, New York; e_flux, New York; Berlinale; Punto De Vista International Documentary Festival, Pamplona; Viennale; Media City Film Festival, Windsor; New York Film Festival; Toronto International Film Festival; and others internationally.

Image: Parastoo Anoushahpour, Faraz Anoushahpour, Ryan Ferko, still from *Surface Rites*, 2021. Courtesy the artists.



Parastoo Anoushahpour, Faraz Anoushahpour, Ryan Ferko:
Lovers' Wind

20 January – 23 March 2024

Lovers' Wind

by Leila Pourtavaf

In 1968, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, the reigning monarch of an increasingly autocratic Imperial State of Iran, commissioned French filmmaker Albert Lamorisse—best known for his celebrated 1956 children's classic *The Red Balloon*—to produce a documentary highlighting the rich history and flourishing development of Iran. The film's production was supported by the Ministry of Art and Culture as part of a program launched by Empress Farah the previous year, and in the larger context of the White Revolution—the Pahlavi State's aggressive modernization project which included far-reaching development and reform initiatives aimed at legitimizing a fragile dynasty fraught by civil unrest. Thus began the story of *Bād-e Sabā*, Lamorisse's last film, titled after the gentle northeastern wind, which was also the cause of his untimely death.

Bād-e Sabā is a visual ethnography narrated through the personification of its namesake, that takes viewers on a journey across the country's vast territories, revealing its diverse geography, ecology, and people. Captured through a helicopter-mounted camera, the innovative cinematography hoped to transcend conventional aerial surveillance by adopting a tempered, frontal perspective that would emulate the gentle sway of the wind. Despite these intentions, the helicopter's powerful propellers occasionally disrupted the scene, stirring up dust and sand, and serving as a stark reminder of a colonial cinematic gaze, with its intrusive focus on exoticized rural landscapes. Upon seeing the original cut, the Shah rejected Lamorisse's bucolic vision and insisted that additional footage be shot of urban areas where the industrial might of the White Revolution and its developmentalist ethos could be brought into sharper focus.

It is said that Lamorisse returned to Iran reluctantly to comply with the Shah's request, this time turning his camera onto technological and engineering innovations within the country: laboratories, factories, universities, and civil infrastructure projects. Among them, the most notable site is that of the Karaj dam, a hydro-electrical project completed less than a decade earlier. The construction of the dam was primarily funded by the United States as part of a foreign aid package intended to quell the influence of the Socialist Bloc in the region during the Cold War. Completed in 1961, the dam electrified Tehran and was considered one of the greatest infrastructure developments of the Pahlavi regime and a crowning achievement of the White Revolution. Yet, in a remarkable twist of fate that foreshadowed the downfall of the regime, Lamorisse's

helicopter crashed in the dam's reservoir after becoming tangled in overhead cables during filming. Lamorisse, his cameraman and the pilot plummeted to their deaths, joining a long list of casualties of the Shah's aggressive modernization project, aided and enabled by the import of Euro-American imperialism. The water-damaged footage of the last flight was recovered from the dam weeks later and is preserved at the National Film Archive of Iran. Remnants of a crashed helicopter still hang over the dam today. Though its origins are unknown and contested, the object acts as a suspended monument to the tragic event. The tension between the materiality of these damaged fragments of the past, and the speculative histories they evoke, has continued to animate narratives about the film.



*I miss Iran but I can't go back. Sometimes getting close to your love kills you. It destroys you.*¹

In the exhibition and multi-channel installation *Lovers' Wind*, named after the English translation of the film, the artists Parastoo Anoushahpour, Faraz Anoushahpour, and Ryan Ferko take Lamorisse and his final work as subject and object of study. Various traces of the film—its footage, soundtrack, script, narrator's voice, and other archival records—are re-envisioned by the artists to offer a critical and contemporary meditation on histories, stories, and fictions that surround *Bād-e Sabā*. Conceived a half-century later during another moment of popular unrest against an authoritative state in Iran, their work mimics the original film's intention to document the Iranian condition, but offers a different

approach: a deconstruction of national identity in the face of state repression, migration, and exile. In the artists' hands, *Bād-e Sabā*'s Iran becomes distinctly legible as a site of fear, anxiety, opacity, and longing.

Throughout the exhibition, elements of the original film and the history of its maker are restaged, rewound, replayed, translated, sped up, slowed down, and otherwise manipulated, multiplied, and collaged, drawing attention to the materiality of images and the film itself, while taking liberty to use these fragments to make new meaning. This confluence allows several stories, both factual and fictitious, historical and speculative, to unfold simultaneously. Filmed between Iran, Tunisia and Canada, *Lovers' Wind* incorporates documented and dramatized interviews, scripted scenes, and various forms of visual abstraction to offer a multivocal narrative that returns the ethnographic gaze back onto Lamorisse. The biographical details of his life weave into the work a critical assessment of his legacy, and stand-in for broader reflections on imperial encounters and the identity formations they foster.

A noteworthy instance is the artists' exploration of the little-known fact that Lamorisse was the inventor of Risk, a board game of colonial strategy for dividing and conquering the world through war and military might. In *Lovers' Wind*, an Arabic edition of the game is played by children on a Tunisian shoreline. We are reminded that Tunisia, while still under French colonial rule (1881-1956), was the site of Lamorisse's early travels and the subject of his first films where he established his orientalist cinematic language. In a different scene, the translated rules of Risk are read in Farsi against the backdrop of the sandbanks of Southern Ontario: *Global domination is the main objective of this exciting and unpredictable game*, reads a character from the instruction book. Later, at the top of a hill, the camera captures a harsh wind shaking the flimsy plastic table where a second character, an Iranian flute player donning a distinct Canada Post work jacket, sits with the board game set up. The two characters begin to play: *Ontario, Afghanistan, Alaska, India, Middle East...* The absurdity of the scene is in part drawn from the fact that this world is clearly not theirs to divide, and yet, we are reminded, they continue to play in and with its every corner.

Postscript:

Bād-e Sabā was completed by Lamorisse's wife and son, and officially released in 1978, eight years after Lamorisse's death. While their version excluded the second-round footage, the Ministry of Art and Culture used this material to create a seven-minute short film intended as a postscript that would venerate both the filmmaker and the Pahlavi

vision of progress. It was a last gasp, released at the dawn of the Iranian Revolution which would see the ultimate downfall of the Pahlavi regime and the establishment of the Islamic Republic. The postscript continues to circulate to this day as a disjointed shadow of the original film—sometimes tacked on at the beginning, other times at the end, acting as a stark reminder of the failed ideals and ambitions embodied in spaces once emblematic of the promise of progress. In *Lovers' Wind*, a decelerated rendition of the short film accompanies an audio interview with an archivist entrusted with preserving the original reels of *Bād-e Sabā*. She offers a captivating account of the film's history, only to suddenly undermine her own authoritative voice: *Maybe all the narratives that we are repeating for 50 years are fundamentally wrong.*²

1. Parastoo Anoushahpour, Faraz Anoushahpour, Ryan Ferko, *Lovers' Wind* (2023; Commissioned by Mercer Union, Toronto), multi-channel video.
2. Parastoo Anoushahpour, Faraz Anoushahpour, Ryan Ferko, *Postscript* (2023; Commissioned by Mercer Union, Toronto), single-channel video.

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Leila Pourtavaf is an Assistant Professor in the Department of History at York University, Toronto. Her research and teaching stand at the intersection of gender, modernity, and Middle Eastern history. Her writing has appeared in both academic and cultural publications including *The American Historical Review* (forthcoming); *The Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*; *Iran Namag*; *INCITE Journal of Experimental Media*; and *ArteEast*. She is the editor of *Féminismes Électriques* (2013), a bilingual collection of essays which reflect on the history of feminist art and cultural production. She is also a member of the Board of Directors and a Faculty Affiliate at the Tavakoli Archives in Toronto.

Cover image: Production still, Parastoo Anoushahpour, Faraz Anoushahpour, Ryan Ferko: *Lovers' Wind*. Courtesy the artists.

Interior image: Parastoo Anoushahpour, Faraz Anoushahpour, Ryan Ferko, video still from *Lovers' Wind*, 2023. Commissioned by Mercer Union, Toronto. Courtesy the artists.