
Session 2 : Tracing History

展覧会「アラブ現代美術展」の開催に際して、日本とアラブの芸術家による対話の場を設ける。

pop-up mathaf
@mori art museum

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モリアート・アラブ現代美術館

same-same but different:
the role of the artist in the arab world and japan

モリアート・アラブ現代美術館

“Arab Express: The Latest Art from the Arab World”

Dates: June 16 - October 28, 2012

Venue: Mori Art Museum (53F Roppongi Hills Mori Tower)

Organizers: Mori Art Museum, The Yomiuri Shimbun

Curated by: Nanjo Fumio (Director, Mori Art Museum),
Kondo Kenichi (Curator, Mori Art Museum)

Curatorial Advisors: Wassan Al-Khudairi (Former Director, Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art),
Hoor Al-Qasimi (President, Sharjah Art Foundation),
Ehab Ellaban (Commissaire, the 12th Cairo Biennale),
Salwa Mikdadi (Former Head of Arts & Culture Programme, Emirates Foundation),
Muhammad Talaat (Former Director, Palace of Arts, Cairo)



mathaf
arab museum of
modern art



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Pop-up Mathaf @ Mori Art Museum

Symposium Co-organized with Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art

“Same-Same But Different: The Role of the Artist in the Arab World and Japan”

Mori Art Museum collaborates with Mathaf to present a weekend of events. Arab artists participating in “Arab Express: The Latest Art from the Arab World” at Mori Art Museum, join Japanese artists active worldwide in giving presentations on their art practices, talks, and a panel discussion comparing contemporary art in the Arab world with that in Japan. This exciting program designed to create a new dialogue and cultural exchange between the two regions is a part of “Qatar-Japan 2012,” a series of events celebrating 40 years of diplomatic relations between Qatar and Japan.

Dates & Time: 19:00-21:00, Friday, September 28, 2012

13:00-18:30, Saturday, September 29, 2012

Venue: Academyhills (49F, Roppongi Hills Mori Tower)

Organizers: Mori Art Museum, Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, Qatar Museums Authority

Curators: Deena Chalabi (Former Head of Strategy, Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art),

Kondo Kenichi (Curator, Mori Art Museum)

ABOUT THE POP-UP MATHAF

Since it first opened in Doha in 2010, Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art has articulated its vision and purpose not simply through its exhibitions, but also by focusing on different strategies for engaging with audiences in Qatar and beyond. The goal of the “Pop-up Mathaf” has been to engage with international audiences through developing a flexible, engaging platform for multiple voices on art and ideas, and to address a substantial knowledge gap around the contexts for Arab contemporary art. The first “Pop-up Mathaf”, called “Interference”, took place in London in collaboration with the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) in July 2011, and included artist talks, workshops, a film screening, a commissioned publication and interactive elements. “Same-Same But Different” is the second “Pop-up Mathaf”, developed in collaboration with Mori Art Museum in Tokyo for a September 2012.

ABOUT MATHAF: ARAB MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

The first institution of its kind in the region, Mathaf offers an Arab perspective on modern and contemporary art and supports creativity, promotes dialogue and inspires new ideas. The 5,500-square-meter (59,000-square-foot) museum, located in a former school building in Doha’s Education City, has a collection that offers a rare comprehensive overview of modern Arab art, representing the major trends and sites of production spanning from the 1840s through the present. Mathaf presents exhibitions that situate the Arab world in relation to a larger art context and also offers programs that engage the local and international community, encourage research and scholarship and contribute to the cultural landscape of the Gulf region, the Middle East, the Arab Diaspora and beyond. For more information, please visit: www.mathaf.org.qa

ABOUT QATAR MUSEUMS AUTHORITY

Established in 2005 by His Highness the Emir, Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al Thani to combine the resources of all museums in the State of Qatar, Qatar Museums Authority (QMA) is a governmental organization whose remit is to develop museums and cultural institutions and provide an effective system for collecting, protecting, preserving and interpreting historic sites, monuments and artifacts. Under the leadership of Chairperson H.E. Sheikha Al Mayassa, QMA is transforming the State of Qatar into a cultural hub of the Middle East. The Museum of Islamic Art, inaugurated in 2008, is the Authority’s flagship project. The organization won further global acclaim with the December 2010 opening of Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art. QMA’s goal of becoming a “global leader in the world of museums, art and heritage” will be advanced in the coming years with ambitious, world-class projects, including the Jean Nouvel-designed National Museum of Qatar. For further information, please visit www.qma.org.qa

ABOUT QATAR-JAPAN 2012

Qatar-Japan 2012 celebrates 40 years of excellent relations between the State of Qatar and Japan. This is realized through a yearlong series of cultural, sporting and business-related activities held in Japan and Qatar. The events highlight mutual understanding, recognition and appreciation of the Qatari and Japanese cultures, traditions and people. Qatar-Japan 2012 also promotes educational opportunities, business relations, economic support and increased cultural exchange between the nations of Qatar and Japan. Qatar-Japan 2012 is led by Qatar Museums Authority, and officially sponsored by Qatar Gas and Qatar Petroleum; the other partners are Qatar Ministry of Culture, Al Jazeera Network, Qatar Airways, Doha Film Institute, Katara, Qatar Ministry of Business and Trade, Qatar 2022, Qatar Foundation, Qatar Olympic Committee, Qatar Tourism Authority, Reach Out to Asia (ROTA), Qatar Friendship Fund, and the Supreme Education Council. To learn more about the Qatar-Japan 2012 project, please visit www.qatarjapan2012.com

DAY 2

13:00-18:30, Saturday, September 29, 2012

■ Navigator: Kondo Kenichi

13:00-14:30

Session 2 “Tracing History”

■ Speakers: Hrair Sarkissian (“Arab Express” participating artist) and Koizumi Meiro (Artist)

■ Moderator: Deena Chalabi (Former Head of Strategy, Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art)

14:30-15:00

Break

15:00-16:30

Session 3 “Subverting Kitsch”

■ Speakers: Zena El Khalil (“Arab Express” participating artist, appearance via Skype) and Sputniko! (Artist)

■ Moderator: Deena Chalabi

16:30-17:00

Break

17:00-18:30

Closing Discussion “Being Arab and Being Japanese: Different But Not So Different”

■ Speakers: All speakers of the symposium

■ Moderator: Nanjo Fumio

Session 2 “Tracing History”



Hrair Sarkissian (Artist)

Born in 1973 in Damascus, Syria. Currently lives and works in Damascus and London.

Hrair Sarkissian was born and raised in Damascus, Syria, and received his foundational training at his father's photographic studio. He also assisted several European photographers, who introduced him to contemporary photography. Recent exhibitions include group shows at Tate Modern in London, Darat al Funun in Amman, the 10th Sharjah Biennial (all 2011), the 11th Istanbul Biennial (2009), and solo outings at SALT Galata in Istanbul and Kalfayan Galleries in Athens (2008-2010). His work has also been published in *Metropolis M* (Nat Muller, 2011), *Bidoun* (Kaelen Wilson-Goldie, 2010), *Contemporary Art in the Middle East* (ed. Paul Sloman, London, 2009) and *Camera Austria* (Sönke Gau, 2008).



Koizumi Meiro (Artist)

Born in 1976 in Gunma, Japan. Currently lives and works in Yokohama.

Koizumi Meiro studied at Chelsea College of Art and Design, London (1999-2002) and Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten, Amsterdam (2005-2006). His previous solo exhibitions include “Stories of a Beautiful Country” at Centro de Arts Caja de Burgos (CAB), Burgos, Spain (2012) and “MAM Project 009: Koizumi Meiro” at Mori Art Museum, Tokyo (2009). He has participated in numerous group shows including “Invisible Memories” at Hara Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo (2011), Liverpool Biennial 2010, “Media City Seoul 2010”, and Aichi Triennale, Nagoya (2010). His solo exhibition in “The Projects Series” at the Museum of Modern Art, New York is scheduled to open in January 2013.



Deena Chalabi (Former Head of Strategy, Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art)

Deena Chalabi developed the “Pop-up Mathaf” in her role as the founding Head of Strategy for Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art. From 2009 to 2012, she oversaw the museum's branding, strategic development and communications, and co-curated the inaugural exhibition of Mathaf's permanent collection of modern art from the Arab world. The first Pop-up Mathaf, “Interference,” took place in collaboration with the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) in London in July 2011 and examined the relationship between art and social change. Chalabi recently became Co-Executive Director, Public Engagement at Alwan for the Arts, a cultural organization in New York City.

Session 2

Although Hrair Sarkissian (based in London) primarily employs photography and Koizumi Meiro (based in Yokohama) works more with performance-based video, both artists address the emotional and aesthetic consequences of social amnesia and historical trauma in their work, and play with ideas about the visibility and invisibility of the past in the present. This discussion examines the role of the artist in researching and re-enacting repressed histories, the artists' relationships to place and displacement, and their thoughts on the possibility of creating opportunities for reclaiming collective memory.



Hrair Sarkissian (front) and Koizumi Meiro (back)
Photo: Mikuriya Shinichiro

Kondo Kenichi I would like first of all to introduce the participants on the platform for this session: Ms. Deena Chalabi, one of the co-curators of this program; Mr. Hrair Sarkissian, an artist participating in the "Arab Express" exhibition; and the artist Mr. Koizumi Meiro.

I will hand it over now to Deena, who will moderate this session.

Deena Chalabi Thank you very much, Ken Kondo. Thank you all very much for being here today. It will be a long day, but I hope it will be an inspiring and thought-provoking one for you. Our first session today is titled 'Tracing History,' and it is my absolute pleasure to have these two artists with us today.

As Ken mentioned, Hrair Sarkissian is one of the participating artists in "Arab Express." He was born in Damascus, Syria and spent his formative years working in his father's photographic studio. He is a very accomplished photographer, and it's a great honor to have him with us today. Koizumi Meiro was born in Gunma, Japan, studied in London and in Amsterdam, and currently lives in Yokohama.

Without further ado, we will start by asking Hrair about his practice. Although Hrair was born in Syria and has a Syrian passport, he is of Armenian origin, and so I would like to ask you, Hrair, if you could talk a little bit about your work and the circumstances surrounding it.

Hrair Sarkissian First of all, I want to thank you all for coming, and also Mori Art Museum and Mathaf for giving me this opportunity to come for the first time to Japan. My work has always dealt, till now, with my background and where I come from. I always try to work around things, stories that relate to me, which are invisible, but in another sense, visible in my daily life or in my surroundings; things that I cannot escape, that are always in front of me.

Photography was the only medium I was introduced to because I was working with my father. I was born in the studio, literally, and since I was a kid that's where I got - that was my study actually. That's how I was introduced to photography, and later I started to dig more, to learn more about contemporary art photography, and that's how I started to travel around, see exhibitions. It became for me a way of dialogue, a way to trace, or let's say, to investigate.

Deena Chalabi Thank you. The pieces in "Arab Express" by Hrair are a series of images called *Execution Squares* that document different locations in Damascus and Syria. But the works that you're going to talk about today are specifically about or relate to the Armenian genocide. Before you start talking about them, I think it might be useful for the audience to understand...

...just to have a little bit of a historical background to these events.

The Armenian people, historically, lived across what was formally the Ottoman Empire and Russia. They were a Christian population. During the late 19th Century, as Turkish nationalism emerged and as problems

escalated between Christians and Muslims in the Balkans, the situation for Armenians became more and more fraught and difficult.

During World War I, when the Ottoman Empire sided with the Central Powers against the Allies, the Armenians suffered considerably and became the victims of a genocide in 1915 in which some 1.5 million Armenians were killed. A lot of Armenians - the ones who survived - also fled Western Armenia - what had been the Ottoman Empire and later became Turkey - to other countries. Many went to Russia and the United States, but also to nearby countries, including Lebanon and Syria, where Hrair's family ended up.

What is now referred to as the Armenian Genocide has still not been acknowledged to this day by the Turkish government, although many other countries recognize it took place. It's still a complicated part of the history of the region. Many Armenians who grew up in Lebanon or Syria or other parts of what we call the Arab world consider themselves Arab, but, of course, it's a much more complicated story, and identity has much deeper roots than is often perceived. Given that background, Hrair, perhaps you would like to talk more about your specific works today.

Hrair Sarkissian Well, I will show two recent works that I've done that deal with, again, my background, which has a lot to do with the genocide, because the genocide is something that we live with to this day. Even after 100 years, we still live it day by day. It's something that we don't forget, something that is one of the mainstays of our identity, even as we become identified within these different societies we live in around the planet.

This work is called *Istory*, and it was shot in public libraries in Istanbul, where people can have access to books, history books of old and new Turkey. The idea for this work came from an exhibition I was in, in one of the municipalities of Istanbul, where there was a panel with a timeline of the history of Turkey that went from 1600 until the establishment of the Republic of Turkey. There was, of course, one date was missing in this timeline, and that date was 1915. For me, it's been always a question of why, as someone who has Armenian origins, I do not exist in Turkey. My story doesn't exist, so I don't have existence.

The idea of photographing these public libraries and archive centers stemmed from this. I wanted to confront the physical evidence of history itself, of me, of my family, and of where I come from, because my grandparents come originally from Eastern Turkey.

The work itself, and the process of making it, was not easy at all, because each library I went to required specific authorization to enter. The main problem was that whenever they read the letter that I got from the art center - then Platform Garanti, now part of SALT in Istanbul, who helped me a lot with this project because I couldn't get into any of these libraries. It was quite impossible. The main problem was my name, because Armenian names always end in 'ian,' which means 'the son of.' Every time they read the letter, it was a very humiliating moment for me just to stand there waiting for them to just let me in or give me the permission to photograph. Of course, after a lot of questions, some refused, and some just let me in without understanding the process of why I would photograph this project.

The second project was done recently, in March 2012, and it is called *Unexposed*. It's about Armenians who were forced to convert to Islam in 1915, again, during the genocide. They had two choices: either be killed, or convert to Islam, change their names, and become Turkish citizens. There were many, but nobody knew the number until now. Recently, in Turkey, but very secretly, the descendants of these individuals who converted, like the second, third, or fourth generation, are re-converting to Christianity. They are getting baptized in the Armenian Church and changing their name, having an Armenian name beside their Turkish name.

So if you meet one of these people, he would not tell you immediately that he has an Armenian name. He will tell you the Turkish name unless you sit with him and he feels he can tell you, if he has a sort of confidence or trust in you. These people live secretly. They always hide their identity. Usually, they come from Eastern Turkey, and they don't stay in their small villages or towns because people around them will find out immediately. What can they do? They move out of the small cities into bigger cities such as Istanbul.

I photographed these people in their houses, where they live with their families. I only managed to find

nine after three years of research and three years of trying to get to these people, because it's very difficult. These people have problems from both sides: identity problems from the Turkish side because the more the Turkish public knows that there are people who are converting to Christianity the more it will open their eyes to the fact that the Armenians are again becoming a bigger society. On the other side, it is the Armenians themselves within the diaspora or within Turkey, the Armenians who did not convert. They are also posing problems saying we don't trust these converted people. How come they are Armenians? What does it mean to be Armenian and how can you be Armenian?

These are the two works.

Deena Chalabi Thank you, Hrair. I think they're very powerful and moving images. Could you explain a little more about the process of talking to these people, the kinds of stories they would tell you?

Hrair Sarkissian The process involved someone who assisted me during these meetings, because I don't speak Turkish, and they don't speak Armenian or English, so I had to have someone with me to translate. The process was we went to their houses, because for me, the idea was that I like to photograph them where they live because it's the only safe place where they feel themselves, and they don't need to hide, even though I was a stranger for them, but somehow we shared the same history.

The process was very long for me and it was very difficult because I had to sit with these people for like two hours just to listen to their stories. That was, for me, the most difficult part of this project because it was as if I was facing these public libraries, this physical evidence of history. It was really like a heavy weight on my shoulders that I had to find a way to deal with. We listened to their stories and then, of course, we had to have dinner or lunch – and then, I had only half an hour to an hour to figure out how to take pictures and where.

Deena Chalabi I noticed a lot of tablespots and tablecloths. Is there a significance to that? Is that the positioning of the subjects?

Hrair Sarkissian No, I think it's a more universal thing because a tablecloth is something that exists in every house, especially this kind of tablecloth, so it doesn't have to be like a sign or a symbol. It's just a general thing for me.

Deena Chalabi Okay. I just have one last question before we move over to Meiro, something less emotional, less about the work and more of a political question. Obviously, we're here in part, thanks to "Arab Express," an exhibition the research for which began far before the Arab Spring, but which has obviously taken on new meaning in the wake of these events. Similarly, this may be not as familiar, but there have been interesting developments between the Arab world and Turkey in the last few years as a result of changing governments and changing relationships to governments. How has this affected the notion of an Armenian identity given that Armenians play this interesting role between these two parts of the Middle East?

Hrair Sarkissian Well, I can tell you that the Armenian community in Syria are taking the side of the government; they definitely won't take the Turkish side because they have already experienced this before. It's also the government that has been, through all these years, protecting the Armenian community, because they are a minority, and one of the main reasons they were doing this was because the Armenians were never involved into politics. They've been only craftsmen or in business.

Deena Chalabi Thank you very much.

Hrair Sarkissian Thank you.

Deena Chalabi Okay. Now, we will hear from Meiro.

Koizumi Meiro Good afternoon everyone, I'm Koizumi Meiro. I'd like to begin by thanking the organizers of this event for giving me the opportunity to present this talk, which is based on the questions I received in advance from Deena. And following my presentation I hope that we can all engage in a discussion.

My work is in the field of video. One video I created back in 2009 is particularly relevant to today's theme; its title is *Portrait of a Young Samurai*. I'd like to start by showing you some clips from it.

[Video Playing]

The same thing repeated.

And then it is repeated again.

It keeps on escalating.

Then it goes on even further.

So that gives you some idea of what this work is like. Let me tell you how I came to make it. From 2005 to 2007 I was living in Holland. I went there as a sort of escape from Japan, where I had felt suffocated. When I returned to Japan two years later, I decided that this time, instead of escaping, I would face up to this country called "Japan."

I wanted to clarify, in my own words, my relationship with Japan, and how I would make a life for myself there. From then on I've been creating works that engage with Japan.

At the time the Japanese media were talking about Japan's shift towards the right. The governor of Tokyo, Shintaro Ishihara was reelected, and several movies about the "kamikaze" suicide squads were released. I had a strong feeling that this emerging nationalism was different from the shift to the right we had seen before. Then last year we also experienced the massive earthquake and tsunami in the northeast of Japan, so people's attention was even more directed inward toward Japan's domestic situation. And there were unprecedented demonstrations in Japan against the prevalence of South Korean entertainment and other forms of pop culture. It was against that social backdrop, that I created my works. A number of issues show very clearly what kind of country Japan is. We can look to the situation in Okinawa, for example, which epitomizes the historical and structural contradictions within Japan. I think this is a subject that is suited to the creation of artistic works. In my case, I became interested in Japan's suicide squads and adopted this as a theme for my work.

The way the suicide squads are represented has changed with the passage of time. In the 1980s, some movies depicted them like a kind of sports team, but in recent movies the depiction has become more emotional. We are seeing more movies these days with a focus on emotional aspects, such as a kamikaze pilot saying farewell to his mother and father.

The issue of the World War II suicide squads has been controversial in Japan. Some think that their deaths were in vain, while others argue they died a noble death that laid the foundation for today's Japan. Some have said that kamikaze pilots were only given enough fuel for a one-way trip; while others deny that claim, saying that they had to have more fuel than that because it was impossible for them to fly straight to their targets. Similar debates have been waged with regard to the suicide attacks by Japan's midget submarines. For instance, some maintain that the hatches of the vessels were sealed so that the operator couldn't get out, while others say that was done to prevent the submarine from being flooded. So, again, there are two opposing views.

One aspect that I have examined with interest is whether the soldiers were ordered to join the suicide squads or whether they were volunteers. One view is that they were unfortunate young men ordered by



Hrair Sarkissian
Photo: Mikuriya Shinichiro

their superior officers to take part; the other view is that the boys all volunteered to go. Even the testimonies of former members of the squads are divided on this. As I read the posthumous letters left by squad members before setting off on an attack, I came to my own conclusion.

My view is that this is not an issue that comes down to whether they were ordered or not. History books say that both happened, depending on the war situation or the superior officers involved. But I don't think this is completely satisfactory either.

It was the military, so of course orders were given. But I think these orders were gradually internalized. In writing their farewell letters to family or friends, taking part in farewell ceremonies, and being invited to step forward as volunteers, the "voice from above" was internalized and became a soldier's own voice. I suspect this was the mechanism by which the squad members began to think in terms of "becoming heroes." Reluctance to go, on one hand, and wanting to go on the other, were both true feelings. I believe these two truths coexisting in one person show the true character of the suicide squad members.

I believe video is a medium capable of presenting this contradictory state without compromising the nature of the contradiction. In my work I am not presenting people with an answer, but rather a question in crystallized form.

I'd like to show you some clips of another work I made last year. It shows images on the front and back sides of a single screen: This is the front side, and this is the back side. The audio is the same for both.

It's a conversation between husband and wife near the end of the war; just an ordinary chat during a meal.

The same scene is shown four times, but what can be seen is different each time. The front and back are also different images, shown from eight different angles. The focus is first on the husband's mouth, then on the wife's eyes. This is the fourth time.

I'll skip the next part because we don't have enough time. At the back you have a view of the whole scene. To start with, it's just a normal scene. They move awkwardly. They're both blind persons, you see. As you watch the back-side images time after time, you gradually realize that they are blind.

Finally, this is the back-side view of the noisy scene you saw a minute ago. I was riding a roller coaster when I shot this scene.

That's it. Thank you.

Deena Chalabi Okay. Well, thank you, both very much for showing your work. I find it very interesting to see them next to each other because, obviously, they are very different, not only in terms of the subject matter, but also because the different media create different effects. Meiro, your work is very emotive, obviously very performative. Whereas, Hrair, there's a quietness and a reflectiveness to yours. But I feel they both have tremendous emotional power. I'm curious, you've both touched on this a little in your presentations, but I'd be interested to know why it is personally important for you to be exploring these hidden histories or perspectives in your work? Whoever wants to answer first: Hrair?

Hrair Sarkissian For me, it's important because, as I said before, it's a heavy weight on me because I live this history every day. It's kind of a therapy for me to make these images and to simultaneously face up to them, because I think there is no other way for me to talk, let's say, or face up to history.

Koizumi Meiro In my case, when I started thinking about what kind of country Japan is, I arrived at the issue of the wartime suicide squads. I don't have any answer to that question; nor does anyone else, I suppose.

Deena Chalabi Thank you. Yes, it's interesting because on the one hand, it is that you are looking at history, but not that

much time has passed. As you say there are still second-generation people from the genocide and plenty of people who have first-hand experience of the Kamikaze story, so not a lot has happened in the interim. Thus we are still reflecting. These are still, sort of, first drafts almost of a commentary. But at the same time, it is interesting as artists that you choose to confront these difficult histories. Not a lot of people want to do that. I'd be interested to know also how your audiences react to these works. What is the feedback that you get about these pieces in different contexts? Hrair?

Hrair Sarkissian For me, the most important part after doing this work has been showing the work, and I always try to show it in Istanbul, in Turkey. It's where the Turkish public is because I also want to know their reaction, how they feel and how they see what I am doing as someone originally from Turkey. But, I get no reaction from the public. Thus, it is still confusing for me. It's like I still want to show my work there and get a response, but I still don't, which is frustrating for me. Now, I am at the level where I want to put this aside and just go and do something different.

Koizumi Meiro This kind of theme lends itself easily to artistic treatment because it encompasses various elements in a condensed form. What I think is difficult is whether you accept this issue or not. The issue of the suicide squads is one that Japanese people have a visceral reaction to. There have been different reactions to this work: some laugh when they see it, others cry. But I haven't come across anyone who has complained about the content.

Deena Chalabi Okay. Thank you.

Yes, as you say, it may be a question of the public needing time. But, given that this is contemporary work and that it shows internationally often - I mean you are both artists who travel and exhibit in different parts of the world, and also you have both lived and studied in different places. I am curious to know how you feel your work translates into different contexts when it's exhibited. Do you feel that you need to explain the histories that your work references or do you feel that you want the work to stand alone? Perhaps, Meiro, you'd like to start this time.

Koizumi Meiro Sure. Ideally a work of art should communicate to the viewer without the artist having to say anything. Many people throughout the world know of Japan's suicide squads, so there's not much need for explanation. But when I treat a less well-known subject, I feel frustrated because I have to do a lot of explaining.

I don't want to create the kind of work that people will pass by without looking at it unless an explanation is attached. I want people to be captivated by the work, first of all, before they take a look at an explanation. That's the sort of work that I seek to create.

Hrair Sarkissian I have two scenarios. For example, in the case of *Execution Squares*, the work I am showing here at "Arab Express," the title was already enough to explain the work, and knowing that I come from the Middle East, I think I don't need any other explanation wherever I show this work. But when it comes to historical themes, such as the two works I showed here, I think an explanation is necessary because, for example, as in Japan, I think the public doesn't know about Armenian history, so then a text is necessary to explain. I know that, emotionally, I always try to reach the audience, but I think, still, I need to also - because there are so many layers in the work - to explain the concept or where it comes from.

Deena Chalabi Okay. Thank you. Final question for the pair of you before we open it up to the audience for their questions

is what do you hope to achieve with your work? I know that's a very, very broad question, but in the spirit of this process of remembering, where would you like to see your work go or even, Hrair, given your last point, where do you think your work might take you next?

Hrair Sarkissian I don't know. I think I put so much emotion into it, I think that's the thing that I am afraid to face in the later steps, I mean. But, I don't know where I am – I think I will stick to photography because it's the medium that I really like, and the medium that I really can speak with, let's say.

Deena Chalabi The emotion that you put into your work, what emotions are you hoping to elicit from your audience? Or is that something that you think about when you are exhibiting?

Hrair Sarkissian Yes, it's this pressure that I feel from all the stories. I mean, no matter what, in most of my works, it always relates to me at the end. Either it's Armenian or even if I do a work in Amsterdam, it has something to do with me. I want to share with the audience, too, the same feelings or try to reach them with my feelings.

Koizumi Meiro In the near future, once I have a clearer grasp of what Japan is all about, then I will feel free to move outside of this framework. As an artist, I want to engage in my work with a spirit of independence and autonomy.

Deena Chalabi Thank you. Now, just one last thing: before we started this session, you were telling us that your new work still deals with the sense of nationalism, but it's also about a larger Asian history and a conversation. Could you just explain a little bit more about that?

Koizumi Meiro For the past two years or so, I have had opportunities to travel to countries in Southeast Asia. This has helped me learn a lot about their historical interaction with Japan. As a result I came to feel ashamed that I had been so ignorant of that history up to that point. And it also made me want to find out more.

I'd like to show you some images of a work I'm currently making. This person is Indonesian. The caption says "worker" but it refers specifically to those used as slave labor by the Japanese army during World War II. Many were exploited in this way in Indonesia and other Southeast Asian countries. Here's another "worker."

An Indonesian artist I'm collaborating with sought out this gentleman for me, and I got him to talk about his experiences as a "worker" during the war. The treatment he received was terrible. He was made to work every day and was only given one potato in return. I'm currently editing the interview with him.

Surprisingly, the man made some comments that justified Japan's invasion of Asia.

Deena Chalabi That's really interesting. Thank you very much for showing us. Thank you both for being willing to explore this topic with us today. I'd like to open the discussion up to see if the audience has any questions for either of our artists.

Audience Member 1 I was just wondering how can we get more from the photos - because I know you interviewed these people, you spoke to them. I don't know if you recorded that as well, but I'm very curious to know what was said during those moments, how it was said, just your interaction with them. Is that available in any form or do you plan on...?

Hrair Sarkissian No. The first person I met, I had a recorder with me. I put it on the table, but I felt so embarrassed with this stupid machine in front of me, I just turned it off. I just wanted to be the only person who listens to these stories because I didn't want to project the stories of these persons, because this is not what the problem is. Actually, the problem is these people are not accepted on either side of the society, so I kept the stories for myself.

Deena Chalabi Thank you. Anyone else? Do either of you have a question for the other?

Koizumi Meiro Yes, I have one question for you. When you show these works in Turkey, do you get censored by the government or threatened by the police or anything?

Hrair Sarkissian I get censored when I write the text because I am not allowed to write the word 'genocide' in the text. We always try to find out. But, I don't need to prove that because I know this is something that happened and this is why I am somewhere else, so I don't need to prove that. For me, it's enough to show the work and how I feel. Of course, there will be people who will get the message and there will be others in the audience who do not, which is always the case.

Koizumi Meiro You said the Turkish government does not recognize this genocide. If they were to recognize it, how would they do so? Officially write it in a textbook? What's the format for recognizing such history?

Hrair Sarkissian I think there would be some kind of a written recognition, and also there are lands that were lost, property like personal fortunes, bank accounts. Now, for example, there is a big issue with the American military base in the Anatolian part, which the government provided to the Americans – the Turkish government allowed an American military base to be set up there. But, this land is owned by an Armenian-American family. They are in the States now, and they are pursuing a lawsuit against the American government. This is just one of the stories. There are a lot of stories, like insurance that people are getting back from a French company who didn't pay any insurance to Armenians who were deported from Turkey, who had bank accounts in Turkey.

Koizumi Meiro It's very specific.

Hrair Sarkissian Yeah, it is.

Koizumi Meiro It's not only symbolic, but it's very specific. Yes?

Hrair Sarkissian Yes.

Deena Chalabi Yes. Just to follow on from that, we mentioned the number of people who were killed, but the number of Armenians now who live in the diaspora is – did you say five to seven million?

Hrair Sarkissian Seven million.

Deena Chalabi Seven million people. So seven million Armenians live outside of the nation that is now Armenia, post the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Three million live in Armenia. But what's interesting is that, speaking about the Armenian-Americans, there has been huge political lobbying in the United States by



Koizumi Meiro
Photo: Mikuriya Shinichiro

Armenian-Americans to recognize the genocide. This is something that has come up many times in the US Congress, and has affected diplomatic relations between the US and Turkey. It's a very big issue that has international ramifications.

Okay. Are there any more questions? There's a hand, yes, please.

Audience Member 2 I have a question, but not something to put on the table. Maybe, it's not a question, but because I'm completely new here, so I don't know the context, I don't know if you did show the Kamikaze work in Qatar. Did you?

Koizumi Meiro No, no. I have never. No.

Audience Member 2 Because, of course, I mean in this context of Japan and Arabic countries, when you see suicide attacks, you think about terrorism, and it's known that some members of the Japanese Red Army did train the Palestinians, and that somehow triggered the fashion for suicide bombers among the Hezbollah Arab revolutionaries. Do you take this in consideration in your work in this framework? I mean, why did you decide to show this, for instance, in a framework of Arab and Japan?

Koizumi Meiro No. I think that you are now giving me a new framework that I am quite interested in and I'd like to explore more. Because when I research the Kamikaze and the people who were the pilots, they don't want to be recognized as terrorists. So they say that when people talk about the similarity between the Kamikaze and suicide bombing in Middle East, they don't like to be compared with them.

Audience Member 2 Yes. That's why I was mentioning the JRA. It's like there is a switch in Japanese culture, as if the communities, the revolutionary armies took from these imperialist patriotic acts something which is a suicidal action, and then becomes terrorism. When they escaped Japan, that's what they told Palestinian terrorists.

Hrair Sarkissian It's the Irish. It was the Irish.

Audience Member 2 It was the Irish, too, yes. But, they were everywhere. They escaped everywhere.

Hrair Sarkissian The first airplane hijacked was Irish, and the Palestinians who hijacked the Israeli plane were also trained by the Irish.

Audience Member 2 Yes. But, this is different to suicide bombers. I mean I'm talking about the ones wearing...

Hrair Sarkissian The belts.

Audience Member 2 Yes, belts.

Koizumi Meiro But in Japan, we have people who say that extreme right and extreme left are very close. They are alike – the way they act, I mean the way they operate. Like if you swapped the ideology behind their actions, then easily the same sort of behavior could be done by the opposite. It's not the ideology that pushes you to do

this kind of thing, but more like the practicality – I don't know if it is cultural thing, but it is more like the practicality of doing it, I think.

Audience Member 2 Another question to you both is about the educational system in both countries, because it seems that when you say, "I conducted some research on Southeast Asia about what happened during World War II with the Japanese army," it's likely you were not aware of it, so it means it's not in history books. Was it the same in Turkey with the Armenians? Do they mention anything? Or is it like completely taboo?

Hrair Sarkissian No, they mention it, but the other version of the story: that the Armenians killed the Turks.

Koizumi Meiro How many people?

Hrair Sarkissian They don't say. I don't know if they give numbers, but if you go to the War Museum in Istanbul, you just see the same history, but it's flipped the other way around with images. They just use the same images but change the text saying Armenian gangsters killed Turks and all these kinds of stuff. The public is educated in this way.

Koizumi Meiro No, we don't have much. We don't know much about history and we're not taught very much, nor is there much in the history books. If you want to know, then there are a lot of textbooks. But these books tell one story and another book tells another story, so it's really difficult to know exactly what we did and what's like the official record – probably, there is no official record, but there's just this story and another story contradicting each other and it's very difficult to know exactly what we did.

Audience Member 2 Also, before, like when you were asked why you are doing this, and you said it's therapeutic: is it more personal therapy – because you could go to a shrink, I mean, instead of doing art. Why did you decide to do art?

Is it also to relay the hidden history to an audience?

Hrair Sarkissian No, because I don't have health insurance. No, I don't think that I want to share with any shrink. It's something that I didn't think about, of going to a shrink because in our culture, we don't have the idea of going to a shrink.

Audience Member 2 To put the missing pages of history books in front of the people or...

Hrair Sarkissian No, it's more to get the pressure off me because it's something, as I said, that's in everyday life. I mean, if I don't think about it, my father, my brother, my mother think about it, and they think about it in public, which means this involves me as well because I cannot avoid it. It's something. It's there. Even if they don't speak, we've been talking about this. It's inherited. The sadness of this trauma, it just passes from one generation to other. Even I didn't - I was not in this genocide, I am the third generation now, but it just goes on from one generation to another. I'm trying to avoid this because I don't want my children to just to grow up and become sad. Thank you.

Deena Chalabi Thank you. I think this is something I imagine that we'll return to later on this afternoon when we have the roundtable on this idea of the relationship between the individual artist and the society, the collective that

we live in, because I think this is something that came up last night. I think it will continue to, so I look forward to having more of a conversation about that later on.

Just one thought for Hrair, just to sort of – what is the percentage of the Armenian minority in Syria? How does it differ with you in terms of you having this conversation there versus Turkey?

Hrair Sarkissian In Syria, it's a very small community. In total, not more than 80,000 Armenians because most of them left over the years. It's a very tiny community. Where I live in Damascus, we are 5000.

Deena Chalabi Thank you.

Hrair Sarkissian Thank you.

Deena Chalabi Any last questions? Okay. All right. Well, I think we'll end the session. Sorry, yes? Thank you.

Audience Member 3 As an artist, a lot of your personal experience is expressed in the work and the project. But, while you are also tracing history, I wonder if you try also to be impartial? For example the history of a person that stays in the country and a person that starts living abroad, the point of view or the family discussion starts to differ. We would like to know like how you negotiate these different layers or if you try to be impartial.

Hrair Sarkissian Well, just the fact of being abroad made me think more openly and look at things differently because, for instance, when I was living with my family in Syria, the idea of buying something Turkish - a Turkish product or listening to Turkish music - was not allowed in our family. It's out of the question. For example, for my father to go to Turkey as a tourist, this is impossible. But, when I started to travel and meet people from abroad, you know just mingling with them and having these different thoughts, it also changed a lot of things in me, and I started to look at things differently. It's the same thing when it comes, for example – yeah, sorry...

Koizumi Meiro It's the same for me, yes.

Deena Chalabi Okay. I think we have time for one more question if anyone else has one. No? Okay. All right. Well, thank you both very much. It's been a very interesting session.

Hrair Sarkissian Thank you very much.

Koizumi Meiro Thank you very much.

Kondo Kenichi Mr. Sarkissian, Ms. Chalabi, Mr. Koizumi – thank you very much.



Deena Chalabi
Photo: Mikuriya Shinichiro