

خلي بالك من زوزو (Arabic, Watch Out for Zuzu)

The word 'archive' takes its origin from the Greek 'arkheia,' meaning 'public records. In 2011, the #Jan25 hashtag used by young activists during the 18 days of the Egyptian uprising which toppled president Hosni Mubarak, went viral. As the political tension grew, images and videos of a packed Tahrir Square in Cairo and other squares across Egypt, were shared on multiple platforms including YouTube, twitter, Facebook, Tumblr and more. Until today, the #Jan25 uprising remains among the most documented and mediatised events in contemporary history.

Lara Baladi's ongoing archival project *Vox Populi* is a web based open media archive which features essentially photo documentation, online press articles, political satire, eyewitness accounts and videos of the 2011 Egyptian uprising and its aftermath, along with data related to other social movements worldwide. The project functions as an 'archaeological record' of the past but also of the present. While offering counter-images to those given by authoritarian surveillance systems and the mainstream media, it sets Tahrir Square as the contemporary archetype of social movements.

The third of a series of multimedia installations 'performing' the *Vox Populi* archive, *Watch out for Zuzu*, follows the first and second installations, *Be Realistic, Ask for the Impossible*, shown in KAI10 in Dusseldorf last November and *Don't Be Too Candid*, shown in Copenhagen last March. As part of the exhibition *Affect Me: Social Media in Art*, *Be Realistic, Ask for the Impossible* captured the zenith of the #Jan25 revolution and that of other global protests, while *Don't Be Too Candid* critiqued 'à la Voltaire' the optimistic demand for a democracy, which animated Tahrir Square and focused on the return of an oppressive regime and power-changing hands: from the state to the people, back to the state, represented by a lion, symbol of authority across cultures.

The third chapter here on show, *Watch Out for Zuzu*, questions the post-revolution political status quo. The ambiguous title can be understood in Arabic to either translate as "take care" or "beware of" Zuzu. Borrowed from a famous Egyptian film's title in which actress Soad Hosny features—known as the 'cinderella of the Middle East' and believed to have been politically assassinated, it warns us of the current political context in which unless we take care of, we should beware of "Zuzu."

Offering an ironic commentary, the central large-scale digital montage is a timeline of the 2011 Egyptian revolution and its aftermath in the form of a board game. On the right, Middle Eastern countries are highlighted in red. They represent the so-called 'Arab Spring.' On the left, Western countries follow the movement with Occupy protests. The timeline of events unfolds as the game moves forward clockwise. Each section of the game refers to a significant event in Egypt's political history from 2011 until today. Khaled Said, the young man who died of police brutality in 2010, embodies all of the #Jan25 martyrs. He thrones at the top of the game and marks the beginning of the count down at 12 o'clock. His mother— mother of all martyrs— holds him on her heart while overseeing the entire game from above. The rule of the SCAF (Supreme Council of Armed Forces) takes power at 3 o'clock. The Muslim Brotherhood wins the presidential election at 6 o'clock and the *coup or not a coup* of General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi starts at 9 o'clock.

Other iconic images from 2011 to today, including shots of an Egyptian flag painted in haste on walls built by the army against the protesters, the blue bra super woman and Egyptian blogger Aliaa Elmahdy (whose blog post of a nude of herself got more than one million views), echo revolutionary global icons and slogans such as “I Am a Man,” borrowed from the 1968 historical Memphis sanitation strike in the US.

The exhibition situates Tahrir Square amongst other global social movements. Across from the board game, a large Soad Hosny with martyr wings sits on the moon, “exiled.” She grieves her (lost) country, she grieves earth. Her death from a balcony—a recurrent, notorious technique used in political assassinations in Egypt in particular, and in the world at large, reminds us of the consequences of being ruled by and standing against the “Zuzus” of the world.

Watch Out for Zuzu offers a thought-provoking portrayal of a historical moment in which the demand for a social justice in Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen and other Arab nations inspired Occupy Movements worldwide and coincided with the tragic *Tōhoku* earthquake and tsunami in Japan.

The installation functions as a complex ‘visual essay,’ documenting—and commenting on—the 2011 Egyptian uprising and its aftermath, from the shift to a youth coalition party, attempt at a fair presidential democratic election, to the return of a military regime and its resonance with other protests, past and present, in the global context,

The work asks viewers to be critical of, and not too ‘candid’ about the revolution process—a process which to be successful, needs time, patience, endurance and continuous commitment. At the centre of the game, the title written in Arabic, “be yourself,” invites the viewer to look within. Revolution starts with one self.

By portraying Egyptian contemporary History as a large-scale board game and placing the world at its centre, the fate of Egyptian citizens depends on a roll of the dice, an apparently innocent gesture but one which in the real ‘game’ of life, frees them, controls them, makes them disappear, sends them to jail or in exile. The design of the board referencing scrolls used in Egyptian elementary schools in the 50s and board games on the theme of the flight into Egypt, yet again reinforces the idea of a return to the past rather than evolution. Re-interpreting the playful nature of games, the piece actively criticises the notion that people’s lives are little more than pawns on a board, wielded by others in positions of power.

By envisioning alternative forms of archiving created by (all) people rather than by governments alone, Baladi adds an influential political role to her practice as an artist, as she negotiates the nature of consent between different players. Tahrir Square revealed the reality of the streets but also the power of the digital world. In the square, the act of archiving the revolution in ‘real time’ was simultaneously an act of revolting. Archiving is a civic duty and a clear sign of resistance, but also a means of contesting the political game waged by governments and groups in times of crisis. *Vox Populi*, in Latin the “voice of the people,” is one of many archival initiatives, which contributes to recording history while acting as a form of political resistance to ensure that the significance of the 2011 Tahrir Square protests, and many other similar protests across the world, is perpetuated.