

Press contact: Eddie Silva
314.535.0770 x313
esilva@camstl.org



Contemporary Art
Museum St. Louis

3750 Washington Blvd
St. Louis, MO 63108
314.535.4660 camstl.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CAM presents an international co-commission by Beirut-based artist and “private ear” Lawrence Abu Hamdan.



Lawrence Abu Hamdan, *Earwitness Inventory*, installation view, Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art, Rotterdam, January 27–April 28, 2019. Commissioned and produced by Chisenhale Gallery, London, in partnership with: Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art; Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis; and Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane. Courtesy the artist. Photo: Kristien Daem.

March 5, 2019 (St. Louis, MO) - The Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis (CAM) presents the United States premiere of a major new co-commission by Beirut-based artist Lawrence Abu Hamdan. *Earwitness Theatre* combines overlapping media, including sound, installation, performance, and text to explore the politics of listening. Through two installations, artist and “private ear” Abu Hamdan presents the psychological, physical, and spatial world of the earwitness. Often building on audio analysis that Abu Hamdan has made for legal investigations and advocacy for humanitarian organizations, his work is acutely attentive to sound. Informed by his acoustic studies of the Syrian prison of Saydnaya, where detainees are often blindfolded and left in darkness, the exhibition examines crimes that are heard but not seen. *Lawrence Abu Hamdan: Earwitness Theater* will be on view at the Museum, May 17 through August 18, 2019.

The exhibition questions the ways in which rights are silenced. But *Earwitness Theatre* also effectively demonstrates how people’s rights may become politically audible. The video installation *Walled Unwalled*, for example, examines a series of legal cases in which evidence was obtained or experienced through walls, doors, or floors. *Walled Unwalled* reveals how solid structures, through contemporary investigative techniques, are increasingly unable to prevent the disclosure of evidence, or maintain a barrier between private and public space.

During his criminal investigations, Abu Hamdan attempted to unlock the acoustic memories of human rights victims. He sought out sound-effects from the libraries of the BBC and Warner Brothers, which would be comparable to the earwitnesses’

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experiences. Abu Hamdan found that these cinematic samples lacked precision, however, which led the artist to build his *Earwitness Inventory*, a library of objects that he has used as mnemonic devices. For CAM, the installation *Earwitness Inventory* is a highly orchestrated presentation of recorded memories, including human whispers, barely recognizable sounds, and a seemingly benign collection of objects that represent hidden narratives. These are objects that have been described in accounts of disasters or offered as evidence in trials, both across history and in Abu Hamdan's own inquiries.



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To coincide with the exhibition, Abu Hamdan will present *After SFX*, a one-night-only performance of sounds from his self-constructed sound-effects library, exploring various aspects of sonic memory relating to his interviews with earwitnesses. He connects sounds to the narratives, some with surprising sonic analogies, such as a building collapsing into a sinkhole "sounding like popcorn."

Lawrence Abu Hamdan (b.1985, Jordan) is an artist and audio investigator based in Beirut, Lebanon. His background as a touring musician led him to develop a deep interest in sound and its intersection with politics, which has become an integral part of his art practice. His audio investigations have been used as evidence at the UK Asylum and Immigration Tribunal, and as advocacy for organizations such as Amnesty International and Defence for Children International. The artist is affiliated with the Forensic Architecture department at Goldsmiths College London where he received his PhD in 2017. Abu Hamdan is the author of the artist book [*inaudible*]: *A Politics of Listening in 4 Acts*. Recent solo exhibitions include Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (2018); Portikus, Frankfurt (2016); Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven (2014); and The Showroom, London (2012).

Earwitness Theatre is commissioned and produced by Chisenhale Gallery, London, in partnership with CAM, Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art, Rotterdam, and Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane. The exhibition is organized for the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis by Wassan Al-Khudhairi, Chief Curator, with Misa Jeffereis, Assistant Curator.

Related Events

Press & Patron Preview

Friday, May 17, 10:00–11:00 am
Join artists and curators for an exclusive introduction to the exhibitions. RSVP to Eddie Silva at 314.535.0770 x313 or esilva@camstl.org

Opening Night

Friday, May 17
Member Preview 6:00–7:00 pm
Public Reception 7:00–9:00 pm

Performance: Lawrence Abu Hamdan

After SFX
Saturday, May 18
Time & venue to be announced

All programs, dates, and times are subject to change.

About the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis

The Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis presents, supports, and celebrates the art of our time. It is the premier museum in St. Louis dedicated to contemporary art. Focused on a dynamic array of changing exhibitions, CAM provides a thought-provoking program that reflects and contributes to the global cultural landscape. Through the diverse perspectives offered in its exhibitions, public programs, and educational initiatives, CAM actively engages a range of audiences to challenge their perceptions. It is a site for discovery, a gathering place in which to experience and enjoy contemporary visual culture. CAM is located in the Grand Center Arts District.

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