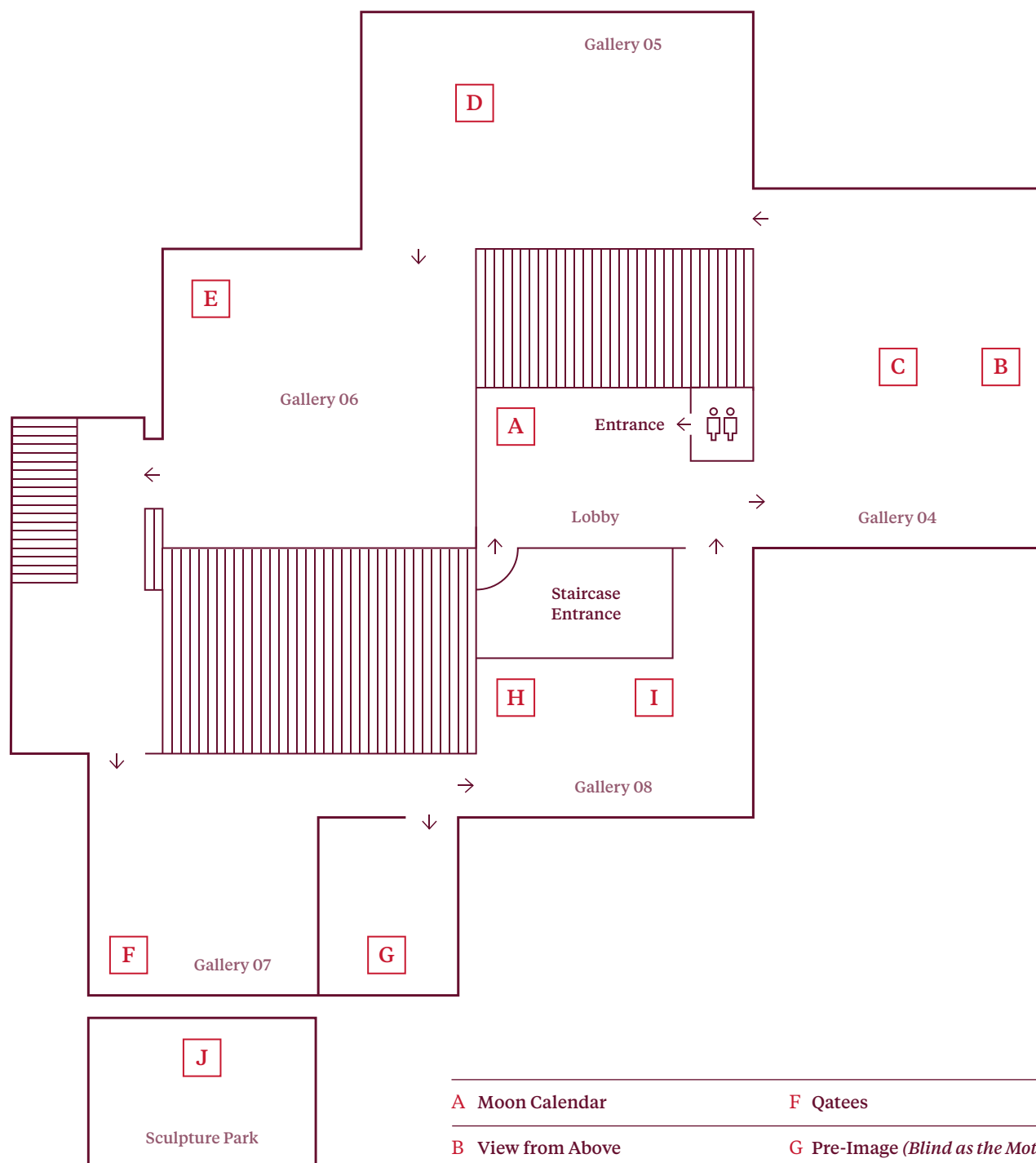


Hiwa K: *Do you remember what you are burning?*

Exhibition Guide

16 December, 2020

24 July, 2021



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*People often ask me,
“Where are you based?”
“On my feet.”
“Where are your feet based?”
“My feet are never based.”*

Employing humour and drawing on familial anecdotes and personal experiences, the work of Hiwa K explores ideas of estrangement, collectivity, histories of neoliberalism and the long shadow of the multiple conflicts waged on and in Iraq – particularly in his home city of Sulaymaniyah.

‘Do you remember what you are burning?’ is the artist’s first solo exhibition in Asia and the Middle East, bringing together works created over the past 13 years. The exhibition begins with *Moon Calendar* – one of the first works produced upon his return to Sulaymaniyah, after having fled Iraq on foot as a refugee in the 1990s; and ends in the Sculpture Park with the large-scale installation *One Room Apartment*, originally commissioned for documenta 14.

A self-proclaimed autodidact, or “extellectual”, much of Hiwa’s practice engages with collective modes of learning and making, and privileges knowledge gained through everyday experiences and personal encounters, rather than from formal or academic channels. At the heart of this is the questioning of the perceived creative singularity of the artist, and the professionalization of the artist and arts education.

Central to Hiwa’s work is his use of *Horizontality* and *Verticality* when applied to knowledge systems, power structures and lived experiences. *Horizontality* implies a field of vision from the ground out; it signifies collective forms of care, of exchange and of learning about the world together. Rooted in living in the moment, this perspective is familiar to those who find themselves un-anchored, in new contexts, perhaps seeking refuge. *Verticality* refers to more hierarchical, official and individual forms of knowing and being in the world; for the artist, this perspective is emblematic of our late capitalist social and political structures. These ideas are at the core of two video works presented in this exhibition: *View from Above* and *Pre-Image (Blind as the Mother Tongue)*.

Another anchor within Hiwa’s work is his exploration of the vernacular – forms created out of everyday necessity and political or economic realities – explored here through the installations *Qatees* and *My Father’s Colour Periods*.

The exhibition also includes *Destruction in Common* – a new, multifaceted work specially commissioned for this exhibition. The carpet in Gallery 4 explores the idea that all cities share a common experience in their destruction over time, and

brings together the artist's interest in *Verticality*, *Horizontal*ity, and collective and embodied forms of learning.

Hiwa's process of making work is durational, reflecting the collaborative nature of his practice, and is characterised by what he calls a "Darwinian approach", or a process of constant and unplanned evolution. While his life story and physical presence are at the centre of his practice, he does not dwell on the personal; instead, his works take us through stories that touch on some of the most prescient issues of our time.

'Hiwa K: *Do you remember what you are burning?*' is conceived as a three-venue collaboration by Jameel Arts Centre with Hugh Lane Gallery, Dublin, and The Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery, Toronto, and the artist Hiwa K.

Hiwa K (b. 1975) Lives and works between Sulaymaniyah, Iraqi Kurdistan, and Berlin, Germany. Working across video, performance and installation, Hiwa's work draws from personal experiences, including family anecdotes, his path through arts education, and daily encounters and occurrences. Hiwa K's works have been included in group exhibitions including documenta 14, Kassel (56); (2017th Venice Biennial curated by Okwui Enwezor (2015); Asian Art Biennial, Taipei (21); (2019st Contemporary Art Biennial Sesc Videobrasil, Sao Paulo (2019); Anren Biennale, Sichuan (2019); Yinchuan Biennale (2018); and MOMA PS1, New York (2019). Recent solo exhibitions include: Kunsthalle Mannheim (2019); S.M.A.K. Museum, Ghent (2018); KW Institute of Contemporary Art (2017) and KOW Gallery, Berlin (2016). His work has been awarded the 2019 Hector Preis and in 2016, both the Arnold Bode Prize and the Schering Stiftung Art Award.

Curator: Nora Razian

With: Rahul Gudipudi

Production Coordinator: Albert Kolambel

Operations and IT Manager: Brent Galotera

Arabic Translation: Rouya, Mohammed Abdallah

Exhibition Graphics: Romy Bitar

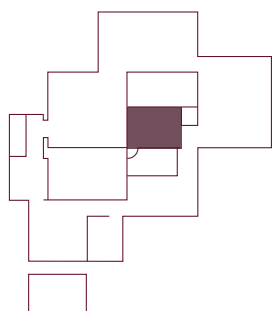
Moon Calendar

2007



Single channel SD video, 4:3,
colour, sound 12:16 min

Courtesy of the artist



Filmed on site at the infamous Amna Suraka or Red Security building, a site of detention and torture of the Iraqi Kurdish population under the Ba'athist regime from the 1980s until its liberation in the early 1990s, *Moon Calendar* is a documentation of a rehearsal for a public performance that never happens. The artist attempts to dance to the rhythm of his own heartbeat, detectable through a stethoscope attached to his chest. As the pace of his movements accelerate, so does the beat of his heart, creating the impossibility of one ever catching up to the other. The reverberations of both his heels and heartbeat throughout the space both produce a sonic reading of the architecture and recall the living bodies once occupying these spaces – and the ceaseless rhythm of corporeal violence inflicted upon them.

Throughout the video we also hear hammering and construction, a testament to the site's transformation from one of violence and repression to one of commemoration and memory – as the Iraqi National Museum of War Crimes. The notion of commemoration is however absent from Hiwa's actions: the performance never takes place precisely to sidestep the fraught arena of memorialisation; instead, *Moon Calendar* momentarily intertwines the artist's body with the materiality of the site and the echoes of the bodies that came before him.

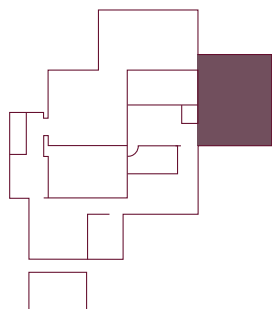
View from Above

2017



Single channel HD video, 16:9,
colour, sound with English
language, 12 min.

Courtesy of the artist



Making evident the power dynamics inherent within Europe's bureaucratic and impersonal asylum process, *View from Above* narrates the story of M, who is forced to embody a hierarchical, or *vertical*, understanding of a city as seen from above, in order to finally have his request for asylum granted.

In 1991, the UN divided Iraq into 'safe' and 'unsafe' zones, with Northern Iraq (Kurdistan) being considered one of the safe zones. This created a new element to the interrogation process whereby asylum seekers were forced to prove they were escaping from an unsafe zone by narrating details of their city or town, which were then compared to a map. This difference between a place known from below versus viewed from above meant that many claimants who were fleeing these 'unsafe' zones failed to pass this line of questioning and were subsequently denied their claims to asylum.

View from Above is screened on the hour, then at 24 and 48 minutes past. There is a daily screening break from 4–4.24pm where you can instead experience the guided meditation by Shunyamurti in full, accessible through the headphones or the provided QR code.



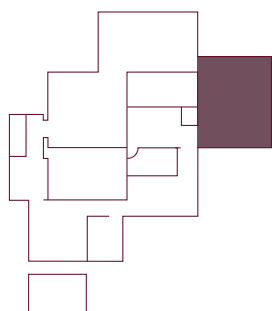
Destruction in Common

2020



Printed carpet, View of Baghdad

Commissioned by Art Jameel



Often placing himself in the position of the amateur, or the learner, Hiwa is interested in exploring how collective, or *horizontal*, forms of knowledge exchange and learning can open up spaces that counter or complicate more vertical forms of interaction, such as academic or institutional forms of knowledge production.

Commissioned for this exhibition, *Destruction in Common* is a large-scale carpet on which an aerial view of the city of Baghdad is imprinted. The carpet serves as a space on which to gather individually or collectively and engage in workshops, performances and meditations that probe ideas of vertical and horizontal knowledge systems, embodied ways of knowing and relating to place, and situating oneself and one's body within a given space.

The work follows on from Hiwa's earlier video work *View from Above* and its probing of the power structures of administrative, or 'official' knowledge versus knowledge gleaned 'from below'.

An audio meditation by Shunyamurti is available as part of the work, either via the wireless headsets or to listen to on your phone via the QR code. A regular series of workshops, performances and meditations is programmed throughout the duration of the exhibition.

Please check www.jameelartscentre.org for future details.



Please remove your shoes
prior to walking on the
carpet



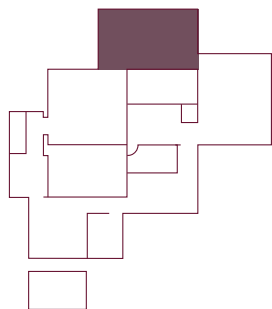
The Bell Project

2007-2015



War metal waste and wood.
Two-channel video installation:
SD and HD video, 16:9, colour,
sound with English subtitles
35:25 min and 25:29 min

Courtesy Collezione La Gaia,
Busca



Visitors are invited to ring the
bell: please ask for assistance

Commissioned for the 56th Venice Biennial (2015), *The Bell* is an expertly crafted copper bell, made from used weaponry sourced in Iraq, which rings in B flat minor. The two videos document the process of making the bell in Iraq and Italy.

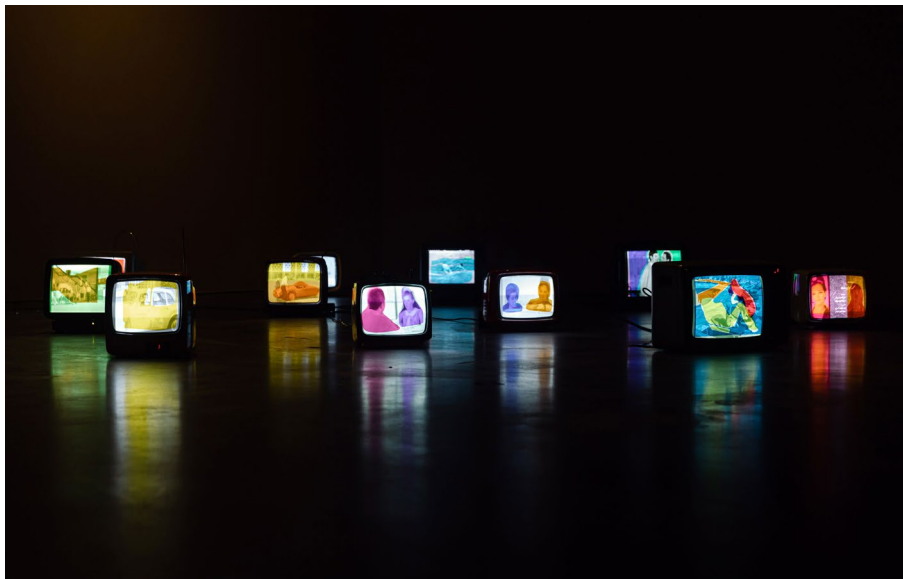
The Bell Project, Iraq, follows scrapyard owner Nazhad as he collects fragments of used weaponry – rockets, bombs, bullets and mines – expended during the various wars and conflicts Iraq has witnessed over the years. Nazhad is a connoisseur of the provenance and use of weapons, able to trace the make and country of origin of different scraps as well as their metal composition.

The second video, *The Bell Project, Italy*, documents the artisanal process of casting and setting the metal bell in a workshop in Italy that has been making bells for over 700 years. Here the artist recalls the way church bells were melted down and made into weapons across Europe during the World Wars. In this reverse process of melting weaponry into a bell, Hiwa produces an object that at once commemorates those uncounted dead of the Gulf Wars – through the symbolic tolling of the bell – and produces a pure musical note, a B flat minor, out of previously ear-splitting weaponry.

During the making of the bell in 2015, ISIS was in the process of destroying historic sites and artifacts across Iraq, including those at the Mosul museum, the most visually recognisable of these being the *lamassu* – a protective figure with a human head and a winged bull's body. The final bell is decorated with reliefs of the *lamassu* and other destroyed artefacts, referencing the ongoing conflicts in Iraq and nodding to the illegal trade in artefacts that in turn supported ISIS's war efforts.

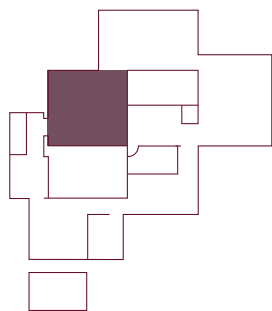
My Father's Colour Periods

2014



Multi-channel video
installation: 16 vintage TV sets
and cellophane sheets

Courtesy Frédéric de
Goldschmidt Collection,
Brussels



“Tonight, the film will be broadcast in colour.”

During the artist's childhood in Iraqi Kurdistan, most TV sets were only set up to produce images in black-and-white. In the late 1970s, the state-owned television station broadcast a film in colour for the first time, creating an optical rift between those cities with mostly Arab inhabitants, who had access to modern TV sets, and the Kurdish region which remained in back-and-white.

As a response to this, and out of a desire to see films in colour, the artist's father adapted the family TV set with coloured cellophane, whose colour and position would alternate weekly. These sheets of cellophane created additional sets for the film characters, who would occupy different spaces of colour at various times during the film's duration. The artist later learned that this practice was prevalent in homes across the city of Sulaymaniyah; a form of collective silent protest.

The advent of the Iran-Iraq War (1980-88) coincided with the availability of colour TV sets all across Iraq, ushering in an era of the flashy pop imagery of the 1980s as well as the gruesome realities of the battlefield.

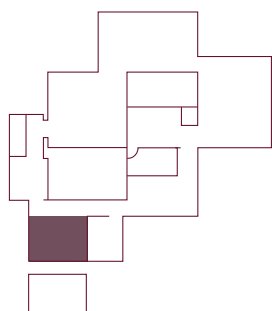
Qatees

2009



Mixed media installation

Courtesy Collezione La Gaia,
Busca



Qatees follows the story of Abbas, an electrician and antennae maker. Having deserted from the Iran-Iraq war (1980-88), Abbas lived in hiding, receiving his news and entertainment through handmade antennae that were able to capture TV signals from both sides of the conflict. This was a common practice at the time, as each side of the conflict was solely broadcasting news of victories; in order to learn the fate of relatives who might have been injured, killed or captured, antennae – such as the ones made by Abbas – were used to capture TV signals coming from the other side. The word *Qatees* alludes to something that is stuck, that can neither be pushed nor pulled.

As with *My Father's Colour Period* and *One Room Apartment*, this work deals with vernacular forms created out of personal or economic necessity and emerging from a particular political reality. In this case, these forms emerge through the intersection of desire, fear, political violence and anachronistic media.

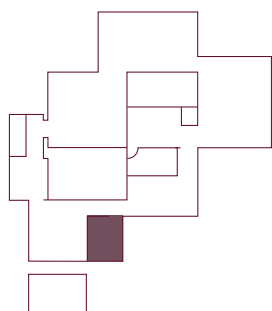
Pre-Image (*Blind as the Mother Tongue*)

2017



Single channel HD video, 16:9,
colour, sound with English and
Kurdish language, 17:40 min

Courtesy of the artist



“What you see in the moment of panic is a pre-image; an image yet to fully become.”

Pre-Image (Blind as the Mother Tongue) re-traces a journey undertaken on foot by Hiwa when he fled Iraqi Kurdistan in the mid-1990s. This long and often dangerous journey – lasting five months and two days and passing through Iran, Turkey, Greece, France and Italy – was an “experience of space and time” and a “fracturing of spatial and cultural experiences.” Each point along the way, whether a city or town, was experienced fractally, and always from below – with no overview.

In this work, the artist uses an adapted balancing device, equipped with motorcycle mirrors, to re-create the disorienting experience of space and time experienced by so many making similar journeys. One mirror reflects what is ahead, another behind, while the others reflect the artist and his immediate surroundings. To walk forward he must balance and control the device, alluding to the effort needed to keep moving and recalibrate oneself to new contexts.

Do You Remember What You Are Burning?

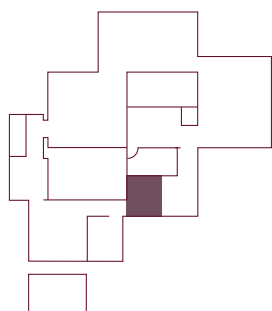
2011-2017



Single channel HD video, 16:9,
colour, sound with Kurdish
language, 4:42 min.

Courtesy of the artist

Shot in the same year and same location (the Saray Azadi) as *This Lemon Tastes of Apple*, the artist invited students to bring a book of choice and quietly read with a magnifying glass, which focused the sun's rays and erased the book's contents, letter by letter. The work also documents the unplanned interactions that such an action can elicit in a public space.



This Lemon Tastes of Apple

2011

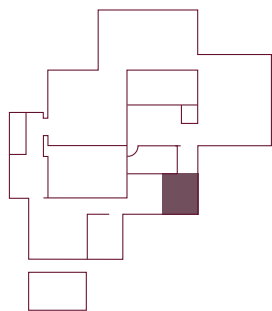


Single channel HD video,
16:9, colour, sound in Kurdish
language, 13:26 min.

Courtesy of the artist

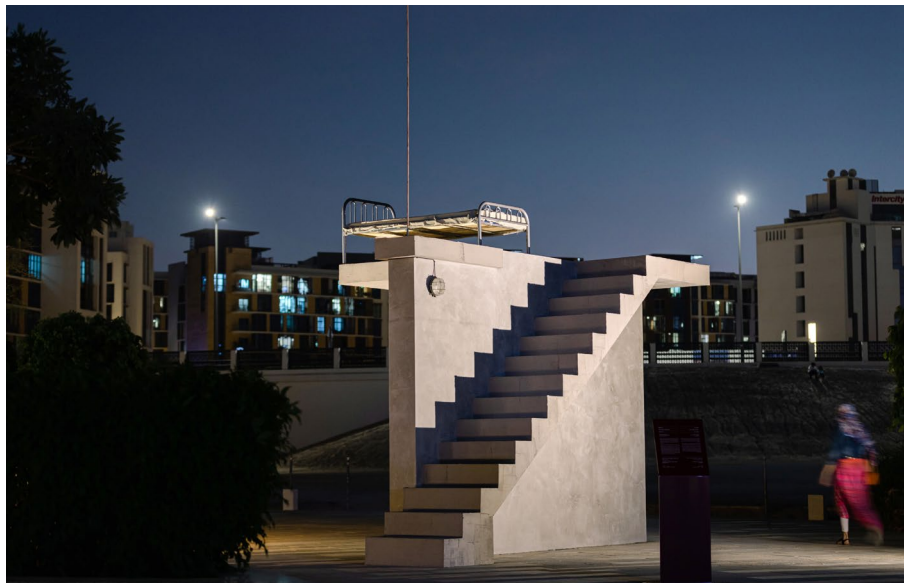
Haunting tunes from Ennio Morricone's *The Man with a Harmonica*, scored for the film *Once Upon a Time in the West*, punctuate demands chanted by protesters on one of the last days of months-long anti-government protest in Sulaymaniyah. Hiwa, seen here playing the harmonica, is at once taking part in the protests and staging an intervention; the melodic tune from his harmonica and accompanying guitar elicit others to join and go forth in protest.

This intervention was not staged for a camera; the footage was later collected from cameramen and journalists on site. The title of the work refers to the chemical gas used by the Ba'athist regime against the town of Halabja and other Kurdish areas, with many survivors noting it had a distinct smell of apples.



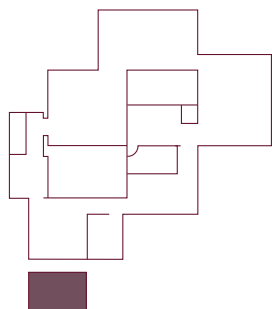
One Room Apartment

2008-2017



Mixed media installation
Protocol, wood, cement,
metal

Courtesy of the artist



One Room Apartment is part of a larger series of works by Hiwa K exploring changing ideas of community and the atomisation of collective life – from the implementation of neoliberal economic policies in the 1970s through to the economic ‘shock therapy’ given to Iraq following the 2003 US invasion.

Originally commissioned for documenta 14 in 2017, *One Room Apartment* is a reconstruction of a house built recently near the minefields in Iraqi Kurdistan. The single occupant dwelling exemplifies new ways of living that began to spread across Iraq following the Gulf Wars and subsequent economic shifts. The work connects the situation in Iraqi Kurdistan to other places around the world undergoing socio-economic shifts. As with many of Hiwa’s works, *One Room Apartment* refers to forms that are part of our everyday, reflect economic or personal necessities, and relate to a particular political reality.

This work is part of the exhibition ‘Hiwa K: Do you remember what you are burning?’ on Level 1 of the Jameel Arts Centre. Free entrance; all welcome.

The exhibition runs from December 16, 2020 until July 24, 2021.

