

**HUGH LANE
GALLERY**

Hiwa K

**DO YOU REMEMBER
WHAT YOU ARE
BURNING?**



7 October 2021 – 13 February 2022



Comhairle Cathrach
Bhaile Átha Cliath
Dublin City Council



hughlane.ie

Hiwa K: Do You Remember What You Are Burning?

In 1996, at the age of 21, the Iraqi-Kurdish artist Hiwa K fled Kurdistan on foot, embarking on a journey to Europe that lasted five months and twenty days. He lived in Germany for almost two decades and in 2020 he moved back to his birthplace of Sulaymaniyah, in Kurdistan.

Do you remember what you are burning? is Hiwa K's first solo exhibition in Ireland, bringing together works created over the past ten years.

The exhibition's title is taken from one of the featured artworks *Do you remember what you are burning?* (2011–17) for which the artist invited students to bring a book of choice to the old town square Saray Azadi (Freedom Square), Sulaymaniyah, the site of many anti-government protests. They quietly read these books with a magnifying glass, focusing the sun's rays and erasing the books' contents letter by letter.

An oeuvre comprising films, installations and performances, Hiwa K's work examines themes of migration, identity and collective ways of being. He concentrates on the conditions experienced by those on the margins of society and frequently refers to the geopolitical ties between his native Kurdistan and the many locations in Europe that he has called home.

There is an insistent energy around Hiwa K's practice which is both emotional and intellectual – a unique combination of autobiographical stories woven through with political and historical narratives which form the backdrop to his performative interventions.

The Bell Project (2019), displayed in Hugh Lane Gallery Reception Hall, was originally conceived for the 56th Venice Biennale *All the World's Futures*, in the Arsenale. It references our global connectivity by uncovering what Hiwa K calls 'the fingerprints that we have left on each other's cultures'.

Commenting on the shift from 'we' to 'I' in his country of origin, Hiwa has said: 'Before the 2003 Iraq war, Kurdish society was a collective one. People shared rooms, pots and pans. Now it is a country copying the Western model of independence. Every day new plans arise for another shopping mall, causing a certain kind of amnesia, in which recognition fades away and new realities arise. No one has the time for each other and society has become increasingly driven by consumerism. Collectivity is a thing of the past'.

In *This Lemon Tastes of Apple* (2011), collectivity and non-hierarchical social structures are again brought into focus. It is named after the distinctive-smelling gas used in a 1988 chemical attack on Kurdish people in Halabja, as well as the lemons which the crowds of anti-government protestors in 2011 in Sulaymaniyah passed to one another to soothe the stinging odour of tear gas.

Other works represented here, such as *Moon Calendar* (2007) and *Diagonal* (2009) bring into focus historical events in Kurdistan and, more broadly, Iraq. While issues of migration and the tense experiences associated with forced exile are explored in *Pre-Image (Blind as the Mother Tongue)* (2017), the geopolitical realities of material and terrestrial exchange are revealed in *Qatees* (2009) and *My Father's Colour Period* (2013).

"The works that I do mostly point with the pinkie; they leave space for the audience to produce their own readings." — Hiwa K

Hiwa K's intense dedication to current concerns makes him one of the most exciting artists working today and we are very pleased to present *Do you remember what you are burning?* in the Hugh Lane Gallery.

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

Barbara Dawson
Director Hugh Lane Gallery

The Bell Project

2019



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 the artist, Galerie KOW, Berlin, Prometeo Gallery, Milano

Displayed in the Hugh Lane Gallery Reception Hall, *The Bell Project* is an expertly crafted copper bell, made from shrapnel and used weaponry sourced in Iraq. The Bell rings in B flat.

The two videos playing on the monitors document the process of making the bell in Iraq and Italy.

The Bell Project, Iraq follows scrapyard owner Nazhad, a Kurdish entrepreneur, 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 an expert of the provenance and use of weapons; he is able to trace the make and country of origin of different scraps as well as their metal composition.

The Bell Project, Italy documents the artisanal process of casting and setting of the metal bell in an Italian workshop 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 K 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, out of previously ear-splitting weaponry.

During the making of the original bell in 2015 commissioned for the 56th Venice Biennale, ISIS was in the process of destroying historic sites and artefacts across Iraq, including those at the Mosul museum. The most visually recognisable of these was 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, referring to the ongoing conflicts in Iraq and also to the illegal trade in artefacts that in turn supported ISIS's war efforts.



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 the artist and Prometeo Gallery, Milano

‘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 K when he fled Iraqi Kurdistan in the mid-1990s. This long and often dangerous journey – lasting five months and twenty 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 as fragmented, and always from below – with no overview.

For this work, the artist adapted a metal rod fitted with motorcycle mirrors which balanced on his nose, to re-create the disorientation of space and time experienced by so many refugees making similar journeys. As the artist makes his way forward on unsteady feet through various terrains, one mirror reflects what is ahead and 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.

My Father's Colour Period

2013



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 set up to produce only 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 black-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, the colours of which he alternated on a weekly basis. 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.



Diagonal

2009



C-Print Photograph

Courtesy the artist and Prometeo Gallery, Milano

In this photograph the artist is inside a fallen watchtower, the male body strained as if in an attempt to push it even farther. The sun is high and a long shadow is cast by the ruin and concrete walls surrounded by barbed wire. The figure – the artist – is energetic, positioned in the way that recalls the classical representation of the masculine body, like in the Greek figure of Discobolus. This work is not specifically a documentation of performance or portrait; the image brings numerous references without the actual circumstances being known.

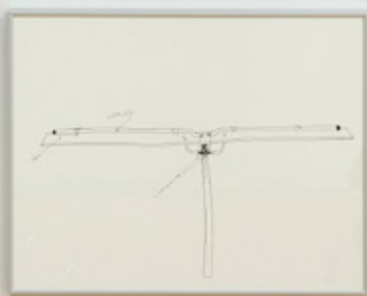
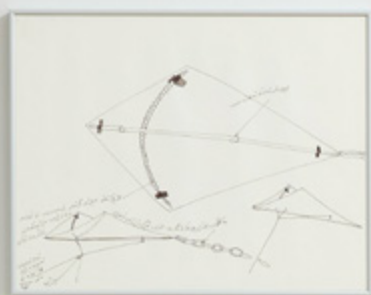
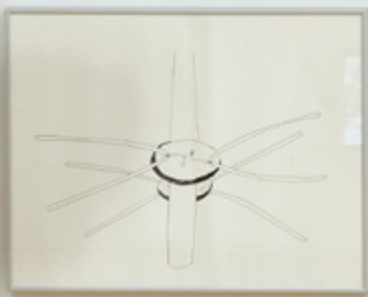
The location is Amna Suraka, the former Red Security Building in Sulaymaniyah. From 1979 to 1991 this building functioned as the headquarters for the northern division of Mukhabarat, Iraq's secret intelligence agency under Saddam Hussein. This building was used for the torture, imprisonment and executions of Iraq's Kurdish population. In 1991 it was taken over by the Kurdish rebels and severely damaged. Still it remains a dark symbol of the authoritarian regime in the very centre of the city. In 2003 it was opened as a museum to document the human rights abuses that took place under Saddam Hussein.

Hiwa K's childhood memories are connected to this site and its shifting history – from a meadow, to a football field, then Amna Suraka's construction site, where he and his sisters and cousins used to play hide-and-seek. The image is from these mixed memories and emotions, pointing towards what is uncertain, in the way one can be present without an ideological position, holding all memories and associations within.

GALLERY 12



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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 only broadcast news of their own 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*, 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.

Subtitles are available for the five videos, if you would like to read more please click [here](#).



GALLERY 12



Moon Calendar

2007



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

Courtesy the artist and Prometeo Gallery, Milano

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 accelerates, so does the beat of his heart, creating the impossibility of one ever catching up with the other. The reverberations of both his heels and heartbeat throughout the space 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. This is to highlight and 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 the artist and Prometeo Gallery, Milano

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 those on a map for confirmation. This difference between a place known from the ground versus one 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.



This Lemon Tastes of Apple

2011



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

Courtesy the artist and Prometeo Gallery, Milano

Haunting tunes from Ennio Morricone's *The Man with a Harmonica* (1964), scored for the film *Once Upon a Time in the West* (1968), punctuate demands chanted by protesters on 17 April 2011, one of the last days of months-long anti-government protest in Sulaymaniyah. Hiwa K, 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 draws out others to join in 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 in 1988 and other Kurdish areas, with many survivors noting it had a distinct smell of apples. During the 2011 demonstrations protestors were attacked by teargas; to relieve the impact of the gas, lemon was used as an immediate detoxifying agent. The fruity smells connect the two ends of this 23-year-long history.

GALLERY 10



GALLERY 10

Do You Remember What You Are Burning?

2011–2017



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

Courtesy the artist and Prometeo Gallery, Milano

For this film, shot in the same year and in the 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.

Hiwa K

Hiwa K (b. 1975) lives and works between Sulaymaniyah, Iraqi Kurdistan and Berlin, Germany. Working across video, performance and installation, Hiwa draws from personal experiences, including family anecdotes, his path through arts education, and daily encounters and occurrences. Many of his works stress collectivity and participation as part of their development. Engaging with and critiquing teaching and learning systems, the artist explores how knowledge can be gleaned through everyday experience as much as through academic rigours.

Hiwa K's works were included in group exhibitions at the 56th Venice Biennial (2015); documenta 14, Kassel, Germany (2017); Yinchuan Biennial, Yinchuan, China (2018); Mori Art Museum, Tokyo (2018); New Museum, New York (2018); Asian Art Biennial, Taipei, Taiwan (2019); 21st Contemporary Art Biennial Sesc_Videobrasil, São Paulo, Brazil (2019); Anren Biennial, Sichuan, China (2019); MOMA Ps1, New York (2019); The Contemporary Jewish Museum, San Francisco, CA (2019).

Recent solo exhibitions include Museum Abteiberg, Mönchengladbach, Germany (2021); Kunsthalle Mannheim, Germany (2019); S.M.A.K. Museum, Ghent, Belgium (2018); KW Institute of Contemporary Art, Berlin (2017); KOW Gallery, Berlin (2016); Kunsthalle C, Stockholm (2015). His work has been awarded the 2019 Hector Preis and in 2016 the Arnold Bode Prize and the Schering Stiftung Art Award.

Public Talks Programme

HUGH LANE GALLERY CULTURE CLUB

Friday 22 October, 10.30 am

Join James Kelly, Director of Feenish Productions, for a talk on documentary-making as a vehicle for storytelling and its role in learning about societal issues.

Free, although booking is required, email to reserve a place: cultureclub@dublincitycouncilculturecompany.ie

DR AILBHE KENNY

Tuesday 26 October, 1pm

‘Welcome Notes? Music for Children living in Direct Provision’. Come and listen to this talk with Dr Ailbhe Kenny, Lecturer in Music Education, Mary Immaculate College. Booking details to follow

HUGH LANE GALLERY CULTURE CLUB

Friday 5 November, 10.30 am

Join us for a live talk on the exhibition with Exhibition Curator Victoria Evans.

Free, although booking is required, email to reserve a place: cultureclub@dublincitycouncilculturecompany.ie

NASRIN GOLDEN

Friday 3 December, 1pm

Please join us for a talk with Visual Artist Nasrin Golden. Details to follow

COFFEE CONVERSATION

Wednesday 12 January, 11 am

Join Head of Exhibitions Michael Dempsey for a live talk on the exhibition. Booking details to follow

We will be adding more talks to this programme, please visit www.hughlane.ie for updates