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## THE BOX

June 1–30, 2013

### Basma Alsharif

*Farther than the eye can see* (2012)

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The center cannot hold. The whirling vortex of Basma Alsharif's *Farther than the eye can see* provides a destabilizing and disorienting complement to Shimon Attie's *MetroPALIS.*, on view in the adjacent gallery. Attie's installation places viewers in the center of a Roman senate of video monitors that provides unified and divergent readings of Israeli and Palestinian national and personal identities. Although viewers of that work are compelled to pivot and drift among the eight monitors surrounding them, they remain drawn to and comfortable within the center of the ellipse. Alsharif's video, shown as a single projection, offers a more fixed presentation than Attie's immersive installation, but it too draws out a physical response.

The video's prologue sets the tone: after an opening gunshot, a synchronized voice and text play overtop of a swirling deep blue colorfield. This visceral combination of sound and image brings out a bodily response in viewers and, at the video's densest moments, creates a sensation akin to centrifugal force. The sense of motion and perceptual disorientation can be so overwhelming and staggering that viewers feel a distinct pressure on their chests as the video propels them away from the screen. The Latin origins of the word centrifugal translate as "center fleeing," an apt phrase on many levels. Attie's installation draws viewers into the middle of the space and allows for multidirectional dialogues and exchanges; Alsharif's exerts a strong, unified force that destabilizes and pushes the viewer away from any sense of "center."

The story at the heart of *Farther than the eye can see* is a move away from a center. A woman recounts her birth in Jerusalem in 1938 and her family's flight to Egypt a decade later when Israel was established as a state. But the tale is mediated in several ways. Overtop of the woman's narration of her story, Alsharif layers a male voice retelling her story in English, but it's a tale told at a remove and out of chronological order. The speaker structures the woman's story in reverse, starting with the flight and ending with her birth. Effect and cause. Place out of time.

Throughout, one of the primary visual motifs Alsharif uses is a Janus-faced perspective shot. Initially, we get a shot of Alsharif riding her bicycle with the view in front of her superimposed with a rear view of the landscape

beyond her. Then the video builds to a lengthy, frenetic sequence (during the woman's recitation of her exile from Palestine to Egypt) that alternates between frontal and rear views of the Jerusalem skyline, creating an effect that recalls pre-cinematic thaumatropes. But instead of creating a joint third conjunction from the rapid juxtaposition of two distinct images, Alsharif's rapid cycling of frames creates a point of view that simultaneously contains the past and the present.

In time-based art, viewers are most frequently confronted with the present moment. But in *Farther than the eye can see*, Alsharif finds ways to scramble our physical and mental responses so that they can never get settled into the moment at hand. A distance always has to be crossed. A conversion always has to be navigated. (These brief notes don't have space for a detailed discussion of Alsharif's masterly use of text and voice in the video.) This allows viewers to confront a nuanced articulation of one of the dominant concerns of Alsharif's work: the subjective experience of statelessness. *Farther than the eye can see* uproots viewers. It makes them flee the center. The experiential condition that arises allows for a bodily understanding of the larger political and intellectual issues at play.

I'd recommend that you, the reader of this card, stick around and let the video play through again. That's why we're showing it on a continual loop all month. Stick around again for the part right after the title card. When the image cuts to black and there's an intense refrain of clapping. Feel this moment inside yourself. This feels important. I don't want to write about this moment for you. This moment is for you. Do you feel it? What is it? Why is it like this? What can we do? Will we do it? Do we dare? You go first. No really. You go first. I'll be right there behind you. I think we can see the way. We just need to tie language back to our bodies. We just have to see farther than the eye can see.

Chris Stults

Associate Curator, Film/Video

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#### Basma Alsharif

*Farther than the eye can see* (2012)

13 mins., video

Courtesy of the artist

Basma Alsharif was born in Kuwait of Palestinian origin in 1983 and received an MFA from the School of Art and Design at the University of Illinois, Chicago, in 2007. Living and working in the United States, Europe, and the Middle East since then, she has shown her work in exhibitions and film festivals internationally, including the Berlin Film Festival, Manifesta 8, the 9th Sharjah Biennale, Toronto International Film Festival, and Videobrasil (São Paulo).

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