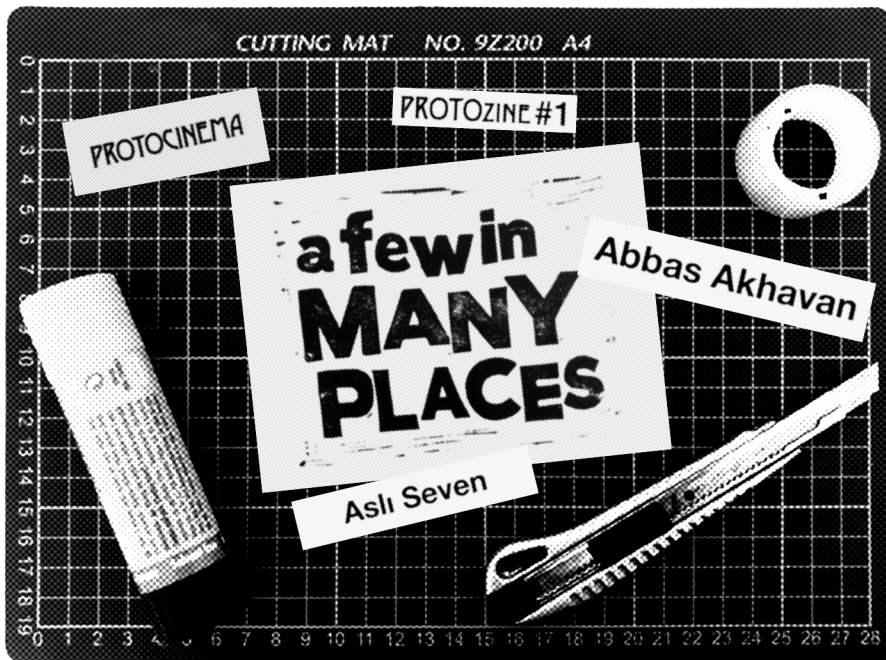


a few in
MANY
PLACES

PROTOCINEMA

PROTOZINE #1



On the occasion of *A Few In Many Places*, **Protocinema** launches **ProtoZine**, comprised of five commissioned texts responding to each intervention from the viewpoint of another city. Taking place across five different cities in North America, Europe and Asia, the hyper-localized group exhibition is globally reconnected by way of this zine—both digitally and in-print—as every contributor responds to the commissioned art works.

A Few In Many Places is conceived with the curatorial intention that these exhibitions, regardless of the scale of audience, are experienced in real life, given the rapid push of digital life interactions. It offers a potential way to move forward, out of internet isolation, including “safe” exchange among our communities. The exhibition’s inclusive and pluralist vision takes this one step further as it allows visitors to learn from sibling interventions, going on simultaneously, and emphasizes a collective spirit. Functioning on a grassroots level—locally and across regions—it is deeply responsive to the unique contexts, in terms of time and place, that both the commissioned works and texts deal with.

Launching today:

Abbas Akhavan’s *Spill and Untitled* (2020) in Montreal; In Response written by **Aslı Seven** from Paris

Stay tuned weekly for texts on all of the artists in *A Few In Many Places*:

Burak Delier’s *Maya* (2020) in Istanbul; In Response written by **Fawz Kabra** from New York

Michelle Lopez’s *Keep Their Heads Ringin’* (2020) in Philadelphia, In Response written by **Abhijan Toto** from Bangkok

Stephanie Saade’s *A Discreet Intruder* (2020) in Beirut; In Response written by **L. İpek Ulusoy Akgül** from Istanbul

Hasan Özgür Top’s *The Fall of a Hero* (2020) in Berlin; In Response written by **Adam Kleinman**

PROTOCINEMA

presents

A FEW IN MANY PLACES

a group exhibition across five cities
beginning September 26 - November 28, 2020

Abbas Akhavan

Montreal, 5376-b Avenue du Parc, Parc Offsite
Ambassador: Eli Kerr
nightly between dusk and dawn
In Response, Aslı Seven, written from Paris

Burak Delier

Istanbul, Şeref Meriç Sk. 2-1 A, Kurtuluş, Ek Biç Ye İç
Baker: Kemal Çayan
Wednesdays - Saturdays 12:00 - 5:00 pm
In Response, Fawz Kabra written from New York

Michelle Lopez

Philadelphia, in the vicinity of the Liberty Bell, Market St. &
Independence Hall
Composer: Austin Fisher
at noon on weekdays
In Response, Abhijan Toto written from Bangkok

Stéphanie Saadé

Beirut, depo in port, exact address to follow, Partner: Marfa’ Projects
Beirut beginning date to follow.
In Response, Rayya Badran written from Beirut

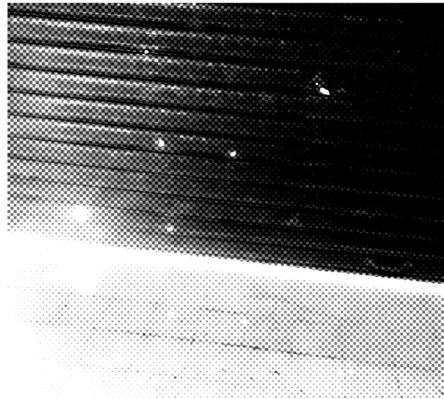
Hasan Özgür Top

Berlin, Skalitzer Str. 114, Kreuzberg, BulBul Berlin
Ambassador & Zine Designer: Cihan Küçük
Tuesdays - Sundays 10:00am - midnight
In Response, Adam Kleinman written from New York

Protocinema presents *A Few In Many Places*, a group show which consists of five artist interventions in five cities, hyper-localized and globally interconnected. These artists: **Abbas Akhavan** in Montreal; **Burak Delier** in Istanbul; **Michelle Lopez** in Philadelphia; **Stéphanie Saadé** in Beirut; and **Hasan Özgür Top** in Berlin; each address inherited cycles of violence, the breaking of these cycles and rebuilding of ideally healthier systems.

A Few In Many Places commissioned works are interventions in a local shop or empty space in the artists' neighborhoods that will be open in or out of quarantine, using low material consumption, without flights or shipping. All of these works are linked by ProtoZine, with texts rolling out over the run of the show by: **Rayya Badran, Fawz Fabra, Adam Kleinman, Asli Seven, and Abhijan Toto.**

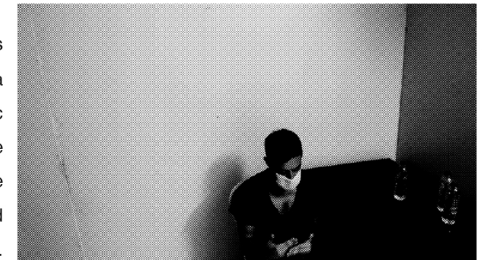
Stéphanie Saadé will reverse actions of the common bullet-rigged metallic storefront for *A Discreet Intruder*, 2020, by piercing a new one with 38 new holes, using a gun and bullets, with the aim of reversing the cycle of violence associated to the stirred up history. The position of the holes on the curtain corresponds to end points of routes taken during childhood. The number of holes corresponds to her age (37) with one extra hole for the departure point of all the routes: her family home. This work is set in an empty depo in the Beirut port, seen from the inside, these holes let in sunlight and a celestial serenity, during unprecedented crises.



Burak Delier's intervention, *Maya*, 2020, will be in the permaculture bakery, Ek Biç Ye İç, Kurtuluş, consisting of a video on cultivating bread yeast by way of voice, sound and

light/videos that reflect the history of the region, then baking and sharing his bread, for people to eat. Yeast inherently has memory that traditionally, before the industrialization of food, goes back many generations and carries with it its own stories and traumas, which work as a metaphor for corrosive lineages in other aspects of civic life.

Hasan Özgür Top focuses on the propaganda materials of the Islamic State and examines the similarities between the narratives of radical and totalitarian movements.



His video, on view in BulBul, Berlin, a Kreuzberg café-bar, *The Fall of a Hero*, 2020, is made with both found and DIY footage in which he constructs a fictional yet self-reflective work, tracing routes of masculine mythologies from the classical era to today.

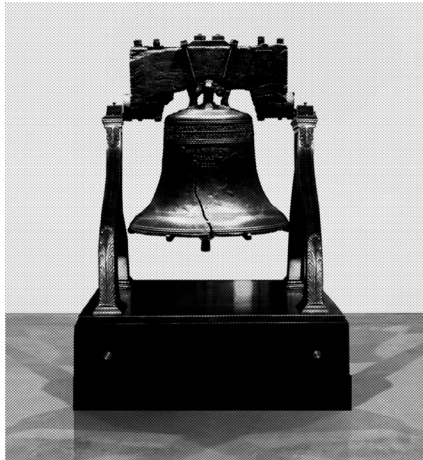
Image may contain: sky, outdoor and nature

A silent video by **Abbas Akhavan**, *Spill*, 2020, will be projected nightly, between dusk and dawn, through the exterior window of Parc Offsite, a new art space in a former apartment rezoned as a storefront in the 1970s. Accompanying this video during the days is a

floor installation inside. This installation lingers somewhere between a set for chroma key filming, a fictional space to both conceal and insert elements, and potentially the material aftermath of a large accident.

In Philadelphia, **Michelle Lopez's** audio installation, *Keep Their Heads Ringin'*, 2020, takes on the complicated symbolism of the American Liberty Bell as an emblem of freedom and equality, which is also marked with failure: its famed crack rendered the iconic hunk of cast-iron broken and silenced at its arrival. Her sound installation will be heard at noon on weekdays in the vicinity of the Liberty Bell, Market Street & Independence Hall, questioning notions of freedom, by lying bare the violence of institutional racism and its degradations. The accumulation of slander will slowly ring the reality of the current American climate by one "ding" and one "dong" at a time.

All of these artists will each activate their own communities on a grassroots level, reflecting on our current context and the cycle of a long line of tragic human sagas and how, if it is possible, we may "turn and face the fire" to realign these cycles for a greater good. These interventions are for real-life audiences, hyper-localized and globally interconnected, for a few people in many places.



Logistics of the Living: Variations on a Crystal Case

Text by Asli Seven

They read Botanic Treatises,
And Works on Gardenin thro' there,
And Methods of transplanting trees
To look as if they grew there.

[...]

They read in arbours clipt and cut,
And alleys, faded places,
By squares of tropic summer shut
And warm'd in crystal cases.

Alfred Tennyson, "Amphion", 1842[1]

No discipline has influenced the fate of the colonial endeavor as much as botany in the 19th century. A hybrid fascination with the lush, tropical plant life and for the industrial and economic benefits of the newly discovered species drove not only the colonial settlers, administrators and scientists, but also members of the elite in metropolises to collect, study and display plant life from the colonies.

The global circulation of non-human living beings, however, was nonexistent, at least not until the 1830s. Transportation was by sea only. It took weeks or months for a ship to get to the ports of London, Bordeaux or Amsterdam. As almost 90% of the plants that were shipped from the colonies in Asia, Africa and America were dead by the time they arrived in Europe, botanists were appointed to these "floating gardens", as they were referred to at the time, to care for the plants, but to no avail. The solution came from an unlikely source in the form of a small glazed case that revolutionized the global colonial infrastructure.

Dr. Nathaniel Bagshaw Ward, who was a plant enthusiast, physician by profession, tried to grow fern and moths in his garden but failed at it due to the polluted London air in 1829. The accidental growth of moss and fern inside a sealed bottle where his moth cocoons were buried allowed Dr. Ward to observe "the moisture which, during the heat of the day arose from the mould, condensed on the surface of the glass, and returned whence it came; thus keeping the earth always in the same degree of humidity"[2]. Thus, the Wardian case, which allowed plant life to survive in autonomy inside a sealed box, was invented.

The so-called crystal case that could enclose and sustain "squares of tropic summer," as Tennyson once wrote, defines a pivotal aesthetic regime within modernity and historically unleashes one of the most pervasive human actions on the planet at an unprecedented scale, namely the global trade and manipulation of plant life and interference in ecosystems. With it, the late 19th century saw an accelerated spread of invasive plant species in all directions, as plant acclimatization, industrial agriculture and bio-patenting turned out to be the vital forces sustaining European colonialism. The Wardian cases were the smallest and the most vital link in terms of the networks of exchange between the small-scale botanical stations in the colonies and the spectacular political and scientific powerhouses in Europe: Kew Gardens in London and, a bit later, *Le Jardin d'Agronomie Tropicale* [The Garden of Tropical Agriculture] in Paris. These institutions lead the selection of industrially and economically profitable

species of plants, and their distribution across the globe, in order to replace less viable species and establish vast zones of monoculture.

From a conceptual point of view, the object itself condenses two modernist imperatives in their apparent contradiction and fundamental entanglement still operative today: conservation and display. The Wardian case is at once an object, a space and a tool. It is not only an integral part of the colonial infrastructure with its portable size and protective design; it is also the ancestor of the present-day terrariums adorning our homes and our gentrified neighborhoods as commodities, and our schools as pedagogical tools. Moreover, it is a miniature greenhouse, a glass box of autonomous life on display, and a scheme for the accumulation of knowledge, capital and attention, all at the same time. As such, the Wardian case collects, displaces and isolates plant life, and serves as a display device that absorbs the gazes of the onlooker on its glazed surfaces.

Over time, the Wardian case diverged in design, as their functions evolved in two directions: logistics (transportation) and display (exhibition). Following the recommendations of *Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle* [The Museum of Natural History] in Paris, dating 1877, in its transportation function, the dimensions of the case needed to ideally be 100x50cm—height varying between 70-100cm. The base had to be elevated for protection from seawater. The upper part needed to have a frame to accommodate the glass, supported by wooden beams every 7 or 8cm. A wire fence had to cover the whole to shelter the glass against frequent impacts at the deck. Inside, the seedlings were planted, preferably in wicker pots to isolate them without breaking, within a careful layering of humid clayey soil that was followed by good quality soil mixed with compost. The soil was, then, covered with a bed of straws, which, in turn, was secured by wooden beams to prevent frequent tremors from affecting the plants[3]. In terms of protection, covers and layers, this design had diverged from the exhibitionary type of the Wardian case, which laid flat on the ground. Instead of solidity and insulation, it prioritized visibility.

The description above, of how to best secure a Wardian case, regardless of what it is that it carries, besides a utilitarian understanding of the category of “plants”, is a poignant example of life reduced to a method of governance. On a symbolic level, “life”, as an attribute, abandons the biologically living and its relational conditions of existence. The necropolitical capture of life in order to produce capital also curtails generative potentials not just in the biological realm, but also in the cultural and epistemological sense. Life primarily becomes a feature of the death-distributing infrastructure: growth of productive and reproductive networks, with accumulations of capital and cycles of returns on investment, surrounded by protective measures—material hardware, as in the Wardian cases, and software as in epistemic violence, insurance policies and catastrophe bonds.

There is a paradoxical relationship between what an unfolded Wardian case shelters and reveals, in line with its conservation-display function: the closed-off and wooden surfaced ones materially cover the plants as they reveal the colonial logistics of power, whereas the exhibitionary ones lay bare the display device in all its theatricality: procedures by which plant life is extracted, isolated and reduced to an image on a grid, as much as it reveals the gazes collected on its surfaces.

And what if we imagine it not only laid flat, but also pulled inside out: does it not look like a theatrical décor or a model house where plants become cut-out fragments? Could we interpret the case as a stage, and the plants as puppets?

When life is symbolically taken away from the living milieu and transferred to become a characteristic of human infrastructures of knowledge and capital, plants do seem like lifeless pieces that need human manipulation to be artificially inseminated, to breed, to travel and to sing a song.

There is, however, another way of looking at this. Humans do not process visual/spatial information without some form of identification. The mimetic bond goes in both ways, affecting the mime's identity – or the puppet master's: every time we manipulate a plant, in some tiny fragment of our consciousness, to a minor degree, we become one – or we think we do. Instead of holding on to the old and exhausted idea of autonomy and purity (be it of species, of knowledge categories or of artistic mediums), we could rewind and try to stay still for a minute in the midst of transition: between mask and persona; between the organism and its surroundings, between the ghost and the mime. Yes, the ultimate problem is, indeed, that of distinction: between the real and the imaginary, between waking and sleeping, between knowledge and ignorance, as literary critic Roger Caillois put it a long time ago[4]. But we could also explore the possibility that we have been—and still are—collectively suffering both from legendary psychasthenia and universal tropical neurasthenia[5].

[1] Lord Tennyson, Alfred. “Amphion”, 1842. <http://www.public-domain-poetry.com/alfred-lord-tennyson/amphion-464>. Last access 22 October 2020.

[2] Ward, Nathaniel Bagshaw. On The Growth of Plants in Closely Glazed Cases. London: John Van Voorst, originally published in 1852.

<https://archive.org/details/ongrowthplantsi00wardgoog>. Accessed on 22 October 2020.

[3] Taken from “Caisses Ward”, *Magasin Pittoresque*. Paris, 1877, pp. 383-384. <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k31460s/f388.item.planchecontact>. Accessed on 22 October 2020.

[4] Legendary psychasthenia is used, here, as the disturbance of the relations between personality and space, as does Roger Caillois in “Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia”, October (31), Winter 1984, MIT Press, pp. 16-32.

[5] Universal Tropical Neurasthenia was a diagnosis in early 20th century colonial medicine, with symptoms ranging from exhaustion, amnesia, sun-pain, neurosis and suicide, affecting colonial settlers in tropical zones and thought to be an effect of tropical light. Anderson, Warwick. *Colonial Pathologies: American Tropical Medicine, Race, and Hygiene in the Philippines*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006.

Aslı Seven is a curator and writer based between Istanbul and Paris. Her research and curatorial projects emphasize fieldwork, critical fiction and collaborative artistic processes with a focus on infrastructural forms of violence embodied within landscape and built environment.



Abbas Akhavan, Untitled (2020), heavy-duty vinyl-reinforced polyester, quilt batting, tropical plants, glass. Photo: Simon Belleau, courtesy Catriona Jeffries, Vancouver; Third Line Gallery, Dubai; Commissioned by Protocinema Istanbul, New York and Parc Off-Site, Montreal



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Biographies:

Abbas Akhavan, catrionajeffries.com/artists/abbas-akhavan/cv

Burak Delier, burakdelier.info/bio-cv

Michelle Lopez, michellelopez.com/cv

Stéphanie Saadé, marfaprojects.com/artists/stephanie-saade

Hasan Özgür Top, hasanozгурtop.com/about

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Protocinema is a cross-cultural, mission driven art organization, commissioning and presenting site-aware art in Istanbul, New York and elsewhere. We produce context-specific projects of the highest artistic quality that are accessible to everyone. Protocinema evokes empathy towards understanding of difference, across regions through exhibitions, educational public programming and mentorship. Protocinema maintains long-term relationships with artists nurturing sustained growth. Founded by Mari Spirito in 2011, Protocinema is a registered 501(c)3, free of 'brick and mortar', sites vary to respond both to global concerns and changing conditions on the ground.

protocinema.com



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