

A large, hand-drawn blue rounded rectangle containing five horizontal lines for writing.



“Traction 2: Workshopping the Riwaq Biennale”
A seminar by Resident Professor Khalil Rabah
Workshop I of Home Workspace Program 2014-2015
Setups / Situations / Institutions
November 17-21, 2014. Ashkal Alwan, Beirut



The 5th Riwaq Biennale June 2014 - June 2016

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Traction 2 is an event produced and organized by the Home Workspace Program Ashkal Alwan, Beirut and the 5th Riwaq Biennale in Palestine.

Traction is a program proposed and organized by the 5th Riwaq Biennale in Palestine.

The 5th Riwaq Biennale (RB5)
Khalil Rabah (artistic director RB5), Tirdad Zolghadr (curator RB5)

Home Workspace Program (HWP) Ashkal Alwan
Christine Tohme (director Ashkal Alwan), Amal Issa (director HWP)

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“Traction 2: Workshopping the Riwaq Biennale”

Traction 2 doubles as the 5th Riwaq Biennale’s contribution (RB5) to the Home Workspace Program 2014-15 at Ashkal Alwan, Beirut. As a whole, the five days of the seminar will reflect all the key components of RB5. It begins with an introduction to the biennale program and the Riwaq agenda, and features extensive tours of sites that were pivotal to the Palestinian experience in and around Beirut. In an exploration of HWP and the RB5 educational program NADI, Traction 2 also addresses the promises and pitfalls of informal art education over recent decades. Finally, the seminar ends with a transregional investigation of the institutional memory of contemporary art since the 1990s.

The seminar forms the second part of the RB5 public program, Traction, which is structured as a long series of responses to institutions and events throughout Palestine and its immediate neighborhood. It aims to push the biennale to be thinking “through” the structures of contemporary art, as opposed to thinking “about” or “against” them.

In this spirit of chronic infiltrations and slow tenacity, RB5 will span a full two years, which may allow this brief visit to Lebanon to become a lasting contribution to a longer, accumulative conversation. Traction 2 is not only an infiltration of HWP in Beirut, where RB artistic director Khalil Rabah is one of the year’s resident professors, but an opportunity for HWP to enrich and indeed infiltrate the RB5 agenda in and of itself.

Timeline

Day 1, Monday the 17th of November

8 pm – 10 pm:

Introduction to Riwaq and the 5th Riwaq Biennale (RB5)

Day 2, Tuesday the 18th of November

*10 am – 1 pm:

Night Vision – Workshop with senior members of Riwaq

*3 pm – 6 pm:

RB5 Ingredients – An in-depth workshop of the 5th Riwaq Biennale

Day 3, Wednesday the 19th of November

*10 am – 7 pm:

Lingering Presence – Tour of institutional landmarks pivotal to the Palestinian/Lebanese experience

Day 4, Thursday the 20th of November

*2 pm – 5 pm:

Classrooms and Capital – Workshop exploring informal art education post-1990s

8 pm – 10 pm:

Vindicating Didacticism – Lecture on art education of formal and informal, sentimental and unsentimental varieties

Day 5, Friday the 21st of November

*10 am – 1 pm:

1990+ Workshop

8 pm – 10 pm:

It's the Thought That Counts – Roundtable

The seminar is open to the public – some events have limited capacity and require registration (see program for more details). To register, please send an email to hwp@ashkalalwan.org

* registration required – limited capacity

Program

Day 1, Monday the 17th of November

8 pm – 10 pm

> *Introduction to the aims and ingredients of the 5th Riwaq Biennale*

With artistic director Khalil Rabah & curator Tirdad Zolghadr

The Riwaq Biennale is named after an institution, not a place. It was initiated in 2005, to expand upon Riwaq's approach aiming at the revitalization of historic centers of 50 towns and villages throughout Palestine. In other words, this biennale comes with an agenda. It is invested in Riwaq's efforts to clarify the growing political and epistemic significance of architectural heritage in local towns and villages. With its concrete political outlook and its durational, discursive approach, Riwaq has always challenged what a biennale can be. This time, the 5th Riwaq Biennale (RB5) will span an entire two years, beginning in June 2014 and ending in May 2016. Its condition is chronic, as opposed to sporadic. (see Biennale Statement and Ingredients for more information on RB5)

> *Introduction to Riwaq and its ongoing engagement with 50 towns and villages throughout Palestine*

With Suad Amiry (founder, Riwaq) & Khaldun Bshara (director, Riwaq)

Since 1991, Riwaq has recognized the challenging complexities of preserving Palestinian collective memory through projects that document and restore architectural heritage sites across the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Harnessing the energy and skills of students, architects, archaeologists, and historians, Riwaq embarked on the Registry of Historic Buildings, a thirteen year project (1994-2007) resulting in the publication of three volumes that include detailed histories, maps, and photos of approximately 420 villages in sixteen districts across the West Bank, Jerusalem, and Gaza. Other projects have not been as vast in size, but boast a similarly powerful vision with equally lasting impacts. Riwaq's "Job Creation Through Conservation," for example, has transformed cultural heritage into an important economic tool, and shifted the concept of architectural conservation from an activity exclusive to affluence, to one that provides skill-building opportunities for residents, and community economic development for neighborhoods,

villages, and municipalities. Utilizing data provided in Riwaq’s Registry of Historic Buildings project, we have concluded that by protecting 50 villages, we would protect nearly 50% of the 50,230 historic buildings in Palestine. Consequently, Riwaq has shifted its priorities and resources from the conservation of single historic buildings to a more comprehensive approach that engages entire communities. Through this work, we believe Riwaq has succeeded in responding to the vital question of what it takes to rehabilitate an entire town, not only physically, but socially, culturally, and economically.

Program

Day 2, Tuesday the 18th of November

10 am – 1 pm

> *Night Vision*

Workshop with senior members of Riwaq, Khaldun Bshara (director, Riwaq), Suad Amiry (founder, Riwaq), Ruba Salim (architect and designer, Riwaq), Michel Salameh (architect/restorer, Riwaq), Lana Judeh (architect, Riwaq), Renad Shqerat (environmental designer, Riwaq), Shatha Safi (architect, Riwaq) and local guests: Hana Alamuddin (Department of Architecture & Design, AUB), Caecilia L. Pieri (Institut français du Proche-Orient), and Yasmine Makaroun (Fine Arts Faculty and Center for Restoration and Conservation, Lebanese University)

This session addresses key challenges and pitfalls of architectural and conservational practice as defined by Riwaq. The workshop will address the possibilities of harboring an overarching professional vision in the context of today, as well as the peculiar role of the public intellectual or social engineer that the Riwaq agenda inevitably invokes.

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3 pm – 6 pm

> *RB5 Ingredients*

An in-depth workshop of the 5th Riwaq Biennale approach and ingredients with Khalil Rabah and Tirdad Zolghadr. Response by Salim Tamari (Birzeit University)

See Biennale Statement & Ingredients for more background information on RB5.

Program

Day 3, Wednesday the 19th of November

10 am – 7 pm

>*Lingering Presence*

Tour of sites and institutional landmarks that were/are pivotal to the Palestinian/Lebanese experience.

With Manal Khader (writer & publisher), Zuhair Rahhal (former political figure), Amira Solh (urban planner), Mahmoud Soueid (director of Institute for Palestine Studies)

The tour will begin at the former United States of Palestine Airlines Regional Office in **Hamra**, near Medina Theatre. It will include:

A visit to the **Institute for Palestine Studies**, the oldest institute to be devoted exclusively to the documentation, research and analysis of Palestinian affairs and the Arab-Israeli conflict. It was established in Beirut in 1963 and incorporated as a private, independent, non-profit institute unaffiliated with any political organization or government. It hosts the biggest archive of documents and images on Palestine and the Palestinian Israeli conflict. Our host will be general director Mahmoud Soueid.

A visit to **Burj Al-Barajneh**, a refugee camp located in the suburbs of southern Beirut which is home to over 28,000 refugees. Founded in 1948, it measures one square km in size and houses refugees from Palestine and the Syrian Civil War. Located within Burj el Barajneh is a UNRWA-supported Women's Learning Center that provides education, vocational training, and childcare for women and families within the camp. Over 2014, the Learning Center has established a catering business managed and staffed entirely by residents of the camp, who will be hosting us for lunch. Our menu: *msakhan*, *mahrourah* and *knafeh nabulsieh* for dessert.

A visit to the **Fakahani** neighbourhood. A one km walk that will take us through the once bustling and politically vibrant area that housed the PLO headquarters, along with constituent organizations, until 1982. A neighbourhood that seems to have moved on to another era – though it takes very little to discover otherwise. Our tour guide is Zuhair Rahhal.

A visit to the **Palestinian Martyr's Cemetery** near **Shatila**.

Program

Day 5, Friday the 21st of November

10 am – 1 pm

> *1990+*

Workshop with anthropologist Kirsten Scheid

The heritage of the nineties forms a key trope for both RB5 and Ashkal Alwan in 2014-15. Kirsten Scheid of the American University of Beirut has conducted extensive research on the institutional memory of the 1990s in and around the cultural landscape of Ramallah, where the focus is customarily on the dramatic impact of the 1993 Oslo Accords. Scheid's research, and the history of the region at large, suggests that broader factors were equally at play, in ways that are yet to be accounted for.

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8 pm – 10 pm

> *It's the Thought That Counts*

A roundtable with:

Vasif Kortun, founder of Platform Garanti in Istanbul, now director of research and programs at SALT Istanbul

Khalil Rabah, co-founder of Al Maamal Foundation for Contemporary Art in Jerusalem, and of the Riwaq Biennale in Ramallah

Suha Shoman, founding director of Darat al Funun in Amman

Christine Tohme, founding director of Ashkal Alwan in Beirut

Akram Zaatar, director and founding member of the Arab Image Foundation in Beirut

William Wells, founding director of the Townhouse Gallery in Cairo

Moderator: Tirdad Zolghadr

The guests at this illustrious roundtable co-founded key institutions during the course of the nineties, and played a decisive, not to say canonical role in the recent history of contemporary art throughout the region. As they look back in retrospect, what are their most significant decisions, and what are the regrets that still have them waking up at night screaming? In tandem with the afternoon session with Kirsten Scheid, this panel is devoted to exploring mutual generational shifts, some 'What If' scenarios, and the opportunities seized and forgotten.

Hana Alamuddin

Hana Alamuddin started her practice in Lebanon in 1999. The practice, Almimariya, Architects and Designers for Sustainable Development, works on architectural, urban design and landscape projects within the perimeters of sustainable development and energy efficient construction. She has projects built in Lebanon, Egypt and Saudi Arabia (see www.almimariya.com). As a member of the executive committee of the Association Pour la Protection des Sites et Anciennes Demeurs, Liban (APSAD) from 1999 to 2008, she worked on several heritage preservation projects in Lebanon and published several articles and a children's book on the built environment.

Hana Alamuddin is also a senior lecturer at the American University of Beirut (AUB) and a board member of the Lebanon Green Building Council. She served as a technical reviewer for the Aga Khan Award for Architecture for three consecutive cycles (1998, 2001, 2004).

Suad Amiry

A prominent architect, writer, and community leader, Suad Amiry is the founder of Riwaq. She is the author of the prize-winning book "Sharon and My Mother in Law" (Feltrinelli, 2003; Premio Viareggio, 2004). Amiry is the Vice President of Birzeit University's Board of Trustees.

She is a Board member for the Palestine Investment Fund, the Palestine Housing Council, and the Jury for The Palestine Award for Culture (headed by the late Mahmoud Darwish). Amiry was an influential member of the Palestinian-Israeli Peace Talks in Washington (1991-1993). In 2004, Amiry received the prestigious Viareggio Literary Award in the international writing category in recognition of her architectural work and her novel "Sharon and My Mother in Law". Suad Amiry attained a BSc from AUB, an MSc in Urban Planning from the University of Michigan, and a PhD in Architecture from the University of Edinburgh. She has taught at Birzeit University and the University of Jordan.

Yasmine Makaroun Bou Assaf

Since 1993, Yasmine Makaroun Bou Assaf has worked intensively on archeological excavations in Beirut and is in charge of the preservation of major sites in Lebanon (Byblos, Nahr El Kalb, Beit Mery, Citadel of Tripoli). Her wide experience in archeological conservation has extended to historical monuments and cities in the MENA region. A consultant in built heritage, she practices her expertise with international institutions such as Iccrom and the World Bank. She teaches at the Center of Conservation and Restoration of the LU in Tripoli since its creation in 1997 and she is today the chairman of the department of architecture at the LU. In parallel she has a professional practice as freelancer in her own agency as designer and consultant in the field of architecture, heritage and cultural projects. She has many publications on archeological sites, vernacular architecture and heritage practices in Lebanon.

Khaldun Bshara

A conservation architect and anthropologist, Khaldun is currently Director of Riwaq where he has worked since 1994. He received his BSc in architectural engineering from Birzeit University (1996) and his MA in Conservation

of Historic Towns and Buildings from the Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium (2000). Interested in space and memory, Bshara graduated from the University of California Irvine with an MA in Anthropology in 2009 and a PhD in 2012.

Lana Judeh

Lana joined Riwaq in 2007 and has worked on rehabilitation projects of historic centers in Palestinian villages, including Taybeh and 'Abwein. She also worked on producing a manual for the rehabilitation of the old city of Ramallah. Lana earned a BSc in architectural engineering from Birzeit University in 2007 and attained an MA in architecture, cultural identity and globalisation from the University of Westminster in 2010. She is interested in researching topics related to cultural identity (gender, ethnicity, power and cultural representation) and their relation to the spatial practices in the built environment, as well as exploring spatial and socio-cultural mapping through different media.

Manal Khader

A Palestinian writer/editor and publisher based in Beirut, Manal Khader is the co-founder and co-editor of Kalamon quarterly review, a multidisciplinary platform for analytical, literary, artistic and academic works on social, political and cultural issues pertaining to the region.

Vasif Kortun

Vasif Kortun is the Director of Research and Programs at SALT, Istanbul and Ankara. He is a curator, writer and teacher in the field of contemporary visual art, institutions and exhibition practices. Kortun is on the board of directors of CIMAM (2010–16); and the Foundation for Arts Initiatives. In 2014 SALT published the first volume of collected essays 10, and the Turkish translation of the 2004 book *Ofsayt Ama Gol* (with Erden Kosova).

Suhail Malik

Malik is Visiting Faculty at CCS Bard, New York, and Programme Co-Director of the MFA Fine Art, Goldsmiths, London, where he holds a Readership in Critical Studies. Malik writes on political economy, theory, and art's axioms.

Caecilia L. Pieri

Caecilia Pieri currently serves as Head of the Urban Observatory at the French Institute of the Near-East, Beirut, where she brings a comparative approach to the urban field of Mediterranean and Middle Eastern studies in the fields of urban history and urban anthropology, with a particular concern on issues such as cities in conflict and heritage as social marker and tool for politics. She received her PhD on the subject of the urban and architectural modernization of Baghdad, where she has been conducting field work for 11 years. An expert within the UNESCO committee for the safeguard of urban and architectural modern heritage in the Arab World, she is the author of *Baghdad Renaissance, Contemporary Art in Iraq* (2003), *Baghdad Arts Deco, 1920-1950* (American University of Cairo Press, 2011), also translated into Arabic. Her forthcoming book is *Baghdad 1914-1960, The Making of a Modern Capital* (in French).

Khalil Rabah

Khalil Rabah is the Artistic Director of the Riwaq Biennale, and co-founder of al Ma'mal Foundation for Contemporary Art in Jerusalem as well as the Riwaq Biennale. He is also the founder of the Palestinian Museum of Natural History and Humankind. He served as a member of the curriculum committee of Home Workspace Program between 2010-2014. Rabah has participated in several biennials including Istanbul (2005), Liverpool (2008), Venice (2009) and Sharjah (2010). His recent solo exhibitions include 'Review', Beirut Art Center (2012), and 'Art Exhibition, Ready Made Representations', Sfeir-Semler Gallery, Hamburg (2012), and 'Pages 7, 8, 9', at e-flux, New York 2013.

Zuheir Rahhal

Zuheir Rahhal is a former member in the political office of the Communist Action Organization in Lebanon (OACL), and a former member in the leadership of the Lebanese National Movement (LNM).

Shatha Safi

Shatha is an architect currently leading rehabilitation projects in historic centers in Palestinian villages as part of Riwaq's 50 Historic Centers Project. Shatha joined Riwaq in 2008 after she received a BSc in architectural engineering from Birzeit University. Since then, she has taken part in different projects including the rehabilitation of Beit Iksa, Hajjah and Birzeit. She is interested in cultural landscape and community involvement.

Michel Salameh

Michel has a BSc in Architectural Engineering from Birzeit University (2005). He has worked in private engineering offices and as a freelance interior designer, and has been working as an architect/restorer at Riwaq since 2008 on the conservation and rehabilitation of historic buildings and historic centers of rural Palestine. In 2011 he joined the 17th International Course on Stone Conservation (SC11) that took place in Rome. He is currently responsible for coordinating and implementing the rehabilitation of villages under the 50 village project, including Adh Dhahiriya and Yatta. Michel is interested in building materials, quality control, and design details.

Ruba Salim

Ruba graduated from Birzeit University with a BSc in architecture in 2001. She began her career as an interior designer, and then worked for a private engineering company in Ramallah. She joined the conservation unit at Riwaq in 2005 as a Project Coordinator. During the last seven years she supervised the implementation of several projects, namely the restoration of traditional buildings in different Palestinian villages in Ramallah, Nablus, and Hebron. She is interested in improving the quality control of design and the intricacy of architectural details.

Kirsten Scheid

Kirsten Scheid is an associate professor of anthropology at the American University of Beirut. She earned her BA in Art History from Columbia University and her PhD in Anthropology from Princeton University. She has

been working in the happy disjuncture between the fields ever since. Her research and teaching interests are Modern and Contemporary Arab Art, particularly in Lebanon and Palestine, Aesthetics and Affect as alternative sources for ethnography and political study, Art Historiography and Theory, Civilizing Discourses and Cosmopolitanism, Activism, and Elites. She has conducted field and archival research since 1992 in Lebanon and Palestine.

Suha Shoman

Suha Shoman is founder and chair of Darat al Funun - The Khalid Shoman Foundation in Amman. She has served on the boards of various cultural institutions in Jordan, including the Jordan National Gallery and the Abdul Hameed Shoman Foundation. She is also a member of the board of trustees of the Institute for Palestine Studies. As an artist she has participated in numerous international art exhibitions such as the 7th Sharjah Biennial (2005), the Singapore Biennial 2008, and was a guest of honor at the 25th Alexandria Biennial for Mediterranean Countries 2009.

Renad Shqeirat

Renad attained her bachelor's degree in architecture from the Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago in 2006. After several years of working between Chicago and Palestine, she joined Riwaq in 2008. In 2010, she completed her master's degree in bio-climatic architecture from the Polytechnic University of Madrid, Spain. Renad is interested in green architecture, and in providing Riwaq with more environmentally green approaches to project design and implementation.

Amira Solh

Amira Solh is an urban planner in Beirut. With a Masters in Regional Planning from Cornell University, Amira has worked in developing community planning tools to empower citizens, natural resource management and poverty alleviation in various countries. Since 2002, she has been working at Solidere, the Lebanese company for the Development and Reconstruction of Beirut city center.

Mahmoud Soueid

Mahmoud Soueid is the General Director of the Institute for Palestine Studies (IPS). He has published a number of books on Palestinian and Lebanese issues.

Salim Tamari

Salim Tamari is a social scientist and senior fellow at the Institute of Palestine Studies (IPS) and former director of the IPS-affiliated Institute of Jerusalem Quarterly and Hawliyyat at Al Quds. He is also a professor of sociology at Birzeit University and an adjunct professor at the Center for Contemporary Arab Studies at Georgetown University. He has authored several works on urban culture, political sociology, biography and social history, and the social history of the Eastern Mediterranean. Recent publications include "Year of the Locust: Palestine and Syria during WWI" (UC Press, 2010); "Ihsan's War: The Intimate Life of an Ottoman Soldier" (IPS, Beirut, 2008); "The Mountain Against the Sea" (University of California Press, 2008)

Christine Tohme

Christine Tohme is an independent curator and founder/director of Ashkal Alwan – The Lebanese Association for Plastic Arts. Since its founding in 1994, the association has committed itself to production, research and circulation in contemporary artistic and intellectual practices. In 2011, the organization opened a 2,000m² multidisciplinary space aimed at providing an educational hub for the region. Ashkal Alwan's platforms include: Home Works, a forum on cultural practices; Home Workspace Program (HWP), a free annual arts study program; Video Works, a support program for video production in Lebanon; artist residencies in Lebanon and abroad; a multimedia library and archive of local cultural practices; publishing critical, artistic and literary works; curated projects; production facilities and grants; and public programming and workshops.

William Wells

William Wells is the founding director of Townhouse in Cairo. Townhouse was established in downtown Cairo in 1998 as an independent, non-profit art space with a goal of making contemporary art and culture accessible to all without compromising creative practice. Townhouse supports artistic work in a wide range of media through exhibitions, residencies for artists, curators and writers, educational initiatives, and outreach programs. Townhouse aims to support and expand the knowledge, appreciation and practice of contemporary art in Egypt and the region.

Akram Zaatari

Zaatari's practice is tied to the practice of researching and studying existing documents. He is interested in looking at the present through a wealth of past photographic records. Zaatari's work reflects on the shifting nature of borders and the production and circulation of images in the context of the current political divisions in the Middle East. His videos and photographic installations look into technologies of image production and communication and the notions of surveillance, exploring the way different media apparatuses are employed in the service of power, resistance, and memory.

Tirdad Zolghadr

Curator and writer, currently affiliated with Al Quds Bard College and the International Academy of Art Palestine in Ramallah. His writing includes novels, essays and criticism. The working title of his third novel is "Headbanger". Curatorial work includes a large number of discreet durational projects and several biennial settings. Zolghadr is currently the curator of the 5th Riwaq Biennale.

The 5th Riwaq Biennale June 2014 - June 2016

The Riwaq Biennale is named after an institution, not a place. It was initiated in 2005, to expand upon Riwaq's approach aiming at the revitalization of historic centers of 50 towns and villages throughout Palestine. In other words, this biennale comes with an agenda. It is invested in Riwaq's efforts to clarify the growing political and epistemic significance of architectural heritage in local towns and villages.

With its concrete political outlook and its durational, discursive approach, Riwaq has always challenged what a biennale can be. This time, the 5th Riwaq Biennale (RB5) will span an entire two years, beginning in June 2014 and ending in May 2016. Its condition is chronic, as opposed to sporadic. A "chronic" condition – from the Greek *chronos* (time) – is persistent and enduring. There's something about a two-year cycle that strikes a chord. Two years is the part of a relationship before things get harder; but it is also the standard warranty for consumer products.

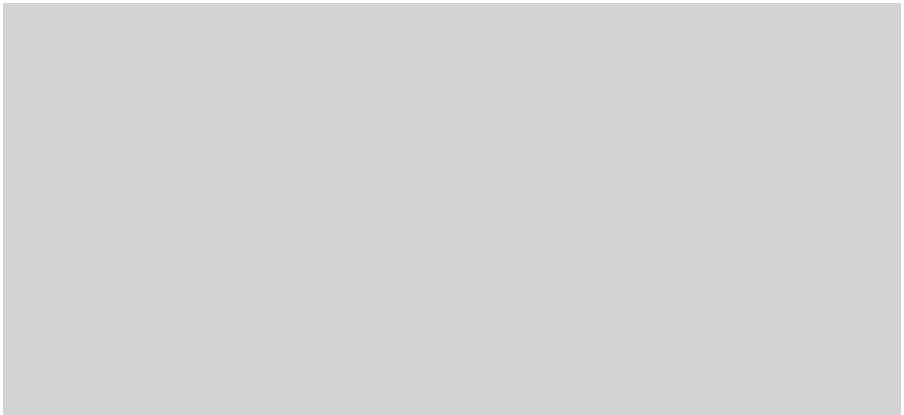
Moreover, RB5 is unusually enmeshed with its context. A two-year schedule is a worthy experiment anywhere, and several biennales have tested comparable premises – Manifesta 2006, Taipei 2010, Berlin 2012, for example. But the idea of the "chronic" resonates differently here, as do notions of "sustainability", "persistence" or "borrowed time". To even mention Gaza is to invoke an unimaginably violent two-year cycle in its own right. If biennales always produce tensions between autonomy and history, art and language, these tensions mean something very different when the terms at hand are colonialism or ethnic cleansing.

Rather than rely on artistic representations of these issues, RB5 aims to realize a limited number of modest proposals. These include promoting and complexifying Riwaq's agenda, tracing regional genealogies of cultural production, and structuring RB5 around existing public events in Ramallah and beyond – as well as developing an educational program and catering to the needs of emergent practitioners in collaboration with local art institutions. The venues for these and other activities are being developed by Riwaq, in collaboration with artists, architects and students.

Our curatorial premise is to think “through” the structures at our disposal. Thinking through structures is not the same as thinking “about” or “against” them. This project does not see structures as topics, or as objects of critique necessarily. It aims to exemplify the agency of structures per se, and to help shape the audiences these structures produce.

This includes the biennale as a structure in itself. In light of our context, other formats may seem more adequate. But a biennale is, first and foremost, a process of accumulation. Over the years, its editions inhabit the public eye as a succession of motifs and stories, highs and lows. On the other hand, a biennale also enjoys a privileged relationship to outreach and volume, limelight and suspense. It is these aspects – a sense of duration and constituency, and of spectacle and ceremony – that form the distinct advantages here.

In other words, RB5 focuses on bodies in space: who was here before, who’s still around, and what could structures like Riwaq have to do with that. So if RB5 may not prioritize exhibitionary display, it does nonetheless emphasize materiality. It approaches objects as aesthetic touchstones, historical pointers and functional infrastructures alike. It addresses the look of thought, the traction of theory, the promises of sustainability in contemporary art, within Palestine and beyond.



The 5th Riwaq Biennale in Five Ingredients

Ingredient 1: 50+

Ingredient 2: Settings

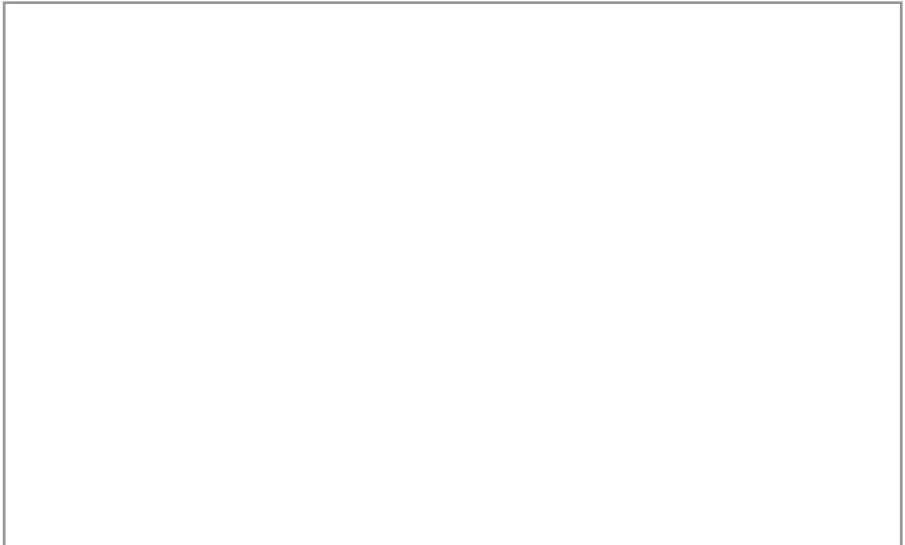
Ingredient 3: 1990+

Ingredient 4: Traction

Ingredient 5: Nadi

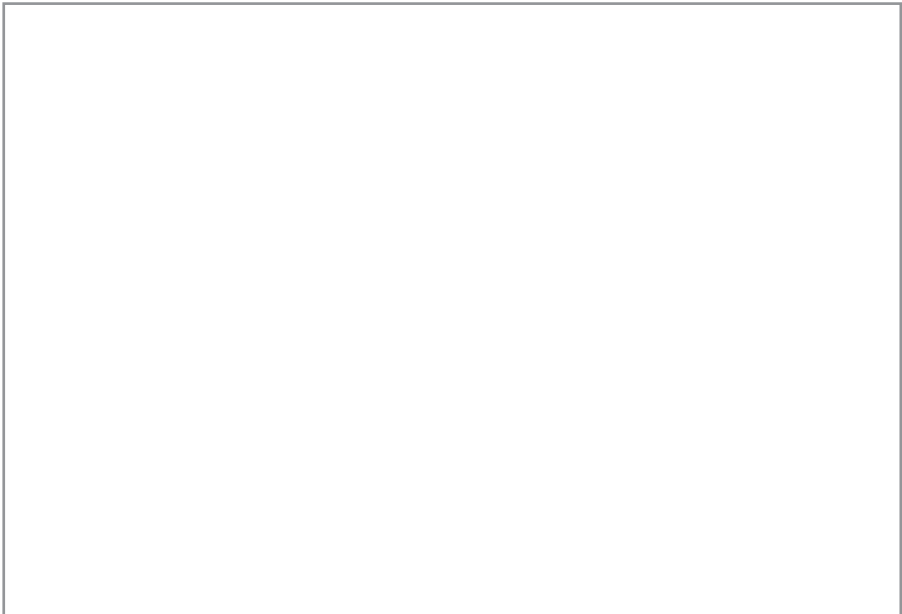
Ingredient 1: 50+

50+ refers to the aim of the Riwaq Center for Architectural Conservation to engage with “fifty villages throughout Palestine”. The village setting is thus inscribed within the Riwaq Biennale’s very mandate. Rather than serving as mere arenas of intervention, the villages proactively test the artistic and political possibilities of a biennale. In some cases, they help reimagine these possibilities from a context far removed from familiar city surroundings. Having reached its fifth edition, the Riwaq Biennale is also gradually building on a growing working relationship with the village communities in Deir Ghassaneh, Dhahiriyyeh, Jaba’, Birzeit, Ebwein, Rantis, Beit Eksa, Yatta among others. But Riwaq itself is equally a promising terrain for the RB5 objective of “thinking through structures”. As an institution, Riwaq doesn’t necessarily focus on settings that are in most need of material protection, nor does it rely on a working formula based on its many success stories. Instead, much of the focus is on areas of unresolved tension and collective disappointments, where the role of an architect, an urbanist, or a public intellectual remains complicated and unclear. This is where RB5 is hoping to join the conversation; hoping to assess what contributions cultural production or a political vision can possibly make.



Ingredient 2: Settings

Thanks to its affiliation with the Riwaq Center and its two-year time span, RB5 will partake in the revitalization of a select number of historic venues across Palestine. These will be the settings for RB5 activities, and will later accommodate activities far beyond the Biennale. RB5 will be renovating, redesigning and reassessing these spaces carefully as it goes along, in collaboration with architects, students, and commissioned artists such as Can Altay, Kris Kimpe and Phil Collins (among others). Hoash al-Etem in Birzeit, for example, will serve as housing for various Biennale participants, Deir Ghassaneh as a venue for 50+ programming, while Beit Assa' in downtown Ramallah will function as a project space. Project spaces are still missing in Ramallah, a town with its fair share of museum projects, galleries and art schooling, but lacking in a venue for artistic trials and errors and conversation, with a smell of mujadara in the air and espresso stains on the floor. Beit Assa' will house a string of minor and major events over time, sometimes offering the solemnity of a classroom, sometimes pulsing with the intensity of a small casino.



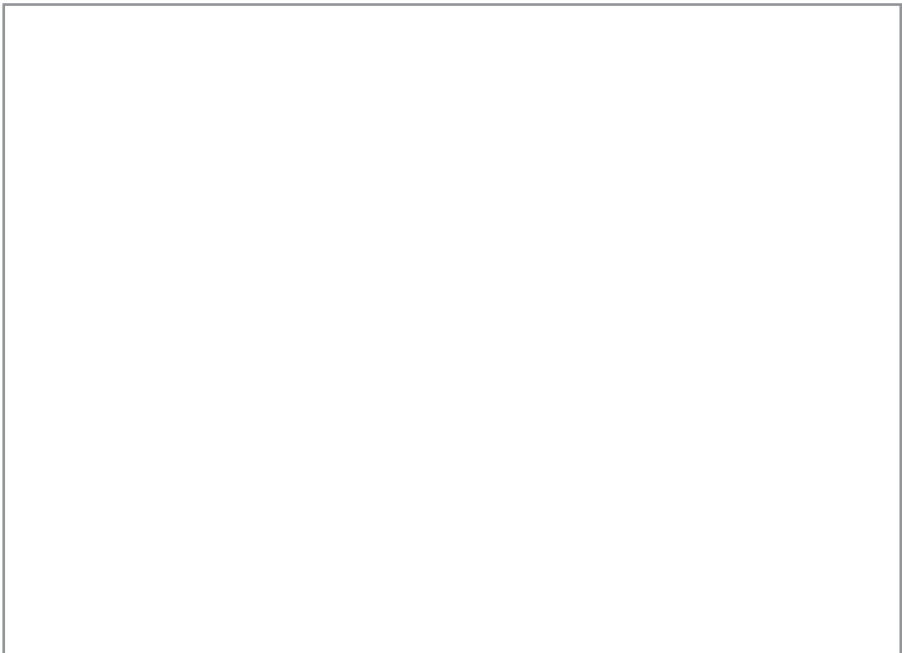
Ingredient 3: 1990+

A series of informal conversations, some public, some private, all meticulously documented, with the aim of assembling a concise history of cultural production in and around Ramallah since the 1990s. The nineties mark a conspicuous generational shift among cultural producers and the institutions they created. A surprising number of shared ideological, professional, even architectural parameters emerge, most of them underexamined. These commonalities seem to exist far beyond Ramallah - in Jerusalem, Beirut, Amman, Sharjah, Cairo and Istanbul alike. What were the key decisions leading to these common grounds, and vice versa? What are the “What If” scenarios here? With luck, an archive of amnesia will gradually emerge. Our interlocutors thus far: Adela Aidi, Nabil Anani, Rema Hamami, Jamil Hilal, Sandi Hilal, Suleiman Mansour, Alessandro Petti, Alia Rayyan, Rawan Sharaf, Tina Sherwell, Vera Tamari, Lisa Taraki and Inas Yassin.



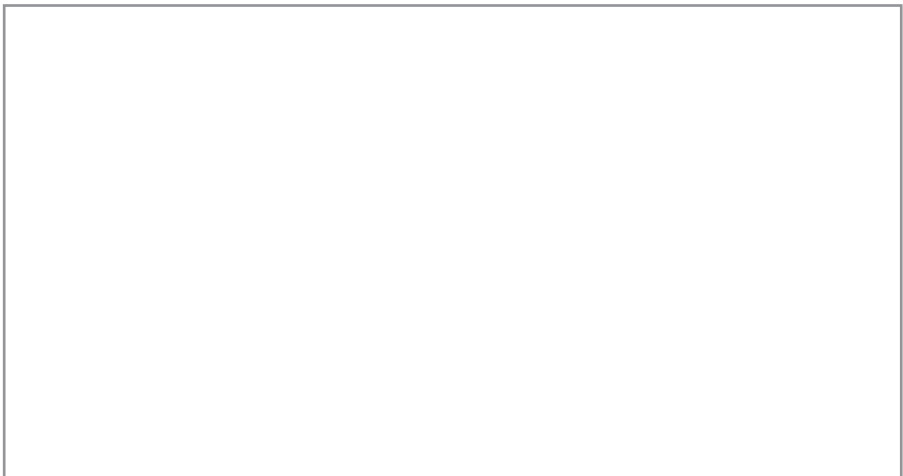
Ingredient 4: Traction

The public program of RB5 is situated firmly within the cultural landscape of Palestine, in that it is structured as a series of responses to local events and programs. Possible examples might range from Qalandiya International, to the curriculum at the International Academy of Art Palestine, to the Home Workspace Program in Beirut, to the Palestine Festival of Literature (PalFest) and others more. Responses will be polemical or supportive, discreet or rowdy, simplistic or subtle. In doing so, Traction will resort to panels, roundtables, lectures, translations, documentations, interior decorating, reading groups, barbecues, TV dinners, boycotts, artist commissions - or anything else that proves useful. Traction also addresses the Biennale as a structure in its own right. It revisits RB history by critically revisiting previous initiatives and re-inviting previous participants. And it persistently asks what you can do with a biennale that you cannot do with anything else. In sum, Traction aims to push RB5 to fulfill its specific potential, well beyond that of some complicated group show that briefly hogs the limelight every other year.



Ingredient 5: Nadi

Nadi is an informal, one-year educational program initiated and monitored by RB5. It is a response to an educational landscape in Palestine that is missing an infrastructure for graduate students. Our aim is to offer tuition-free training in the language of contemporary art, an exploration of its theoretical and political dimensions, and an introduction to its practical working premises. Thematically, coursework will be closely tied to the working premise of RB5 itself, thinking through the structures of art and culture today. Another aim, however, is to foster a sense of professional solidarity within a small collective of emergent practitioners. The five members of the Nadi will form a core audience for RB5, perhaps the only constituency that sees the event in its entirety. The group will also partake in a number of sessions reserved for them alone: from artist-run workshops to research assignments, from study groups to social occasions. It bears mentioning that Nadi group expeditions are currently being developed with several institutions abroad. Nadi members are currently being identified in partnership with Al-Ma'mal Foundation for Contemporary Art, the Media Studies Department at Al-Quds Bard College, A. M. Qattan Foundation, Birzeit University Museum, Decolonizing Architecture Art Residency (DAAR), Idioms Film, International Academy of Art Palestine, Khalil Sakakini Cultural Centre, Palestinian Art Court - Al Hoash and Riwaq.





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