

18.03. – 29.4.2022

The Tellers

curated by Davood Madadpoor and Katharina Ehrl (Sumac Space)

On Friday, March 18, Villa Romana will open **The Tellers**, a group exhibition of five artists—**Mohamed Abdelkarim, Ali Eslami, Maha Maamoun, Basim Magdy, Islam Shabana**.

The exhibition investigates possible future scenarios, inviting us to experience an imaginary and fluctuating time where the future is inextricably linked to the present and the past. Intuitive speculations are narrated through storytelling, referring to objects, places, or events located in the future or relegated to the distant past, imaginary or traumatic enough to escape memory. The aim is to invent new myths and propose new visions, questioning forgotten and removed history and using it as an escape route and an opportunity for social criticism. For the five artists, storytelling involves examining existing narratives and striving to construct truths that lie outside the dominant cultural history. These artists invite us to see through the eyes of the other, welcome us into their new worlds and push us towards the evanescent line that subtly distinguishes the real from the imaginary.

"After The Green Wave of Iran in 2009, I have always carried with me a duality of optimism and anxiety about the future", says Davood Madadpoor, co-curator of the exhibition, "a future that I will never be able to articulate as a time-based event. Rather, I would like to see my future as scrolling through a timeline on a post-production application, one that I can navigate freely without an obligation to "snap" to a specific date."

In conjunction with **The Tellers**, on Saturday 19 March, starting at 11.00 a.m., **Villa Romana** will host a **symposium** aimed at providing food for thought on the key topics of the exhibition, thanks to the contributions of **Raffaella Baccolini** (University of Bologna, Forlì Campus), **Nat Muller** (independent curator, writer and academic) and **Santiago Zabala** (research professor in philosophy at Pompeu Fabra University in Barcelona, Spain). The meeting will be closed by a public discussion and a performance by **Mohamed Abdelkarim**.

The exhibition and symposium are curated by **Davood Madadpoor** and **Katharina Ehrl**, founders of **Sumac Space**.

Sumac Space is a platform devoted to Contemporary Art from the Middle East through digital programs, critical writing, and research. In particular, Sumac Space focuses on dialogues as a medium for presenting diverse forms of research. This format stimulates interaction and polyvocality and encourages critical thinking and intimate conversation that is not limited by physical distance or particular means of expression. Sumac Space also uses digital programs to activate the role of artists and curators in re-imagining and shaping our times and aims to provide a public space for their research and diverse forms of expression.

Mohamed Abdelkarim is an artist, performer, filmmaker, and researcher living and working between Cairo and Maastrich. Abdelkarim's practice is performance-oriented. He considers performance as a research method and a practice through which he produces texts and images that embody multiforms.

Ali Eslami is an artist and engineer from Iran based in Amsterdam who has been active and experimenting with VR since 2014. His work involves long-term research projects that build up and grow over time through speculations and world-building by carefully observing the nature of reality, the human condition, and constructs that are taken for granted, and trying to push it further to extreme or twisted thresholds.

Maha Maamoun is an artist, curator, and independent publisher. Her work examines the form, function, and currency of common visual and literary images as an entry point to investigating the cultural fabric that we weave and are woven into.

Basim Magdy is an artist and filmmaker. His films, paintings, and photographic works are layered with poetic details and colorful observations that allude to absurdity as a daily occurrence. His work mixes humor with fiction, historical references, and collective delusion -- all of which seem to be trapped inside a confused sense of time where the past, present, and future constantly switch places.

Islam Shabana's work examines the intersection between technology, mythology, and Islamic philosophy. Exploring concepts such as system-social dynamics, religious performative rituals, and occult practices, he engages in simulation, poetry, science fiction, and future speculations. Shabana utilizes multiple technologies to interweave these concepts, producing/reproducing entangling structures between myth, fiction, and physical realities.

Raffaella Baccolini teaches Gender Studies and American and British Literature at the University of Bologna, Forlì Campus. She has published numerous articles on women's writing, dystopia and science fiction, trauma and memory, modernism, and young adult literature.

Santiago Zabala is ICREA Research Professor of Philosophy at the Pompeu Fabra University in Barcelona. He is the author of many books, including *Being at Large: Freedom in the Age of Alternative Facts* and *Why Only Art Can Save Us: Aesthetics and the Absence of Emergency*.

Nat Muller is an independent curator and writer with expertise in contemporary art from the Middle East. She has curated video and film screenings for Rotterdam's International Film Festival (NL), Norwegian Short Film Festival (NO), International Short Film Festival Oberhausen (DE), and Video D.U.M.B.O (USA), among others.

INFORMATION

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Soft Opening: Friday 18 March, 4 – 8 pm

Opening hours: Tuesday to Friday 2 - 6 pm and by appointment