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PROPOSALS ON MONUMENTALITY

Exhibition Dates: 2 November 2014 – 4 January 2015

Opening Reception: Sunday, 2 November 2014, 7 – 9 pm

Green Art Gallery presents *Proposals on Monumentality*, a group show curated by İpek Ulusoy Akgül, and featuring the work of Aslı Çavuşoğlu, Iman Issa, Christian Jankowski, Amina Menia, Seher Shah and Santiago Sierra.

In 'Monumental Seduction' (1996), Andreas Huyssen suggested that historical, aesthetic and national contexts, along with political and cultural effects, dominate our understanding of the monumental, articulating the issue of the monumental in relation to memory and modernity.¹ Bringing together the works of Aslı Çavuşoğlu, Iman Issa, Christian Jankowski, Amina Menia, Seher Shah and Santiago Sierra, *Proposals on Monumentality* attempts to twist and open up our perception of monumentality along with complex dynamics of commemoration, space and power. Curated by İpek Ulusoy Akgül, the exhibition poses a set of questions for us to reflect upon: Can monuments go beyond representing the past and evoking collective memory? Is it possible for them to resist absorption into memorial narratives? How can monuments express fragmentation and forgetting?

Such questions are particularly relevant in *Heavy Weight History* (2013), a work by Christian Jankowski whereby he investigates the role of people in crucial moments of history and juxtaposes the physical weight of monuments to their historical weight. In a 26-minute video, the artist playfully documents a group of Polish champion weightlifters attempting to lift monumental public sculptures in Warsaw, among which are a statue of Ronald Reagan and various Communist era-memorials. Using the language and aesthetics of mass media, often at the heart of his practice, Jankowski collaborates with a well-known sports commentator who narrates the unique 'sports-artistic-historical' event where lifters 'challenge history' with different levels of success. A black-and-white photograph of the first monument erected after liberation in 1945, commemorating the Polish People's Army, accompanies the video installation. Jankowski, who had previously created numerous life-size public sculptures, continuously looks at spatial politics of public space and commemoration, and draws on issues of national self-image, communism and masculinity.

Also focusing on monumentality's relationship to history, Aslı Çavuşoğlu traces often-ambiguous historical fragments, and questions the fictional nature of historiography through various media. In *The Demolition of the Russian Monument at Ayastefanos* (2011), the artist focuses on a historical moment in 1914 – the destruction of a Russian monument in Ayastefanos (present day Yeşilköy in Istanbul). Çavuşoğlu substitutes the missing footage for the event's documentation by Ottoman army officer Fuat Uzkinay, who is commonly considered as the first Turkish filmmaker, with two found images – one before and the other after the war memorial's demolition. Following her inquiry into rupture and continuity in history, she points at the power dynamics involved in processes of remembering and forgetting in the context of a monument's purposeful destruction, or an attempt at erasing the formal marks of political failure.

Memory, identity, public space and local history are recurring themes in Amina Menia's work that often goes beyond the gallery space through various architectural interventions. In her photographic series *Chrysanthemums* (2009-ongoing), she further explores these themes, ironically referring to *inaugurer les chrysanthèmes* (to inaugurate chrysanthemums), a French proverb well-known in the artist's native Algeria. Having travelled along the country's Northern coast as part of her ongoing research on multifaceted relationships between memory and space, she demonstrated a keen interest in two sets of monuments – vandalized, forgotten or ignored commemorative stelae and monuments dedicated to martyrs. As Menia reflects on post-colonial history and politics, she investigates highly-charged narratives and associations attached to these structures and their potential as political communication tools.

¹ Andreas Huyssen, 'Monumental Seduction,' *New German Critique*, No. 69, Richard Wagner (Autumn, 1996), pp. 181-200

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Another artist who studies the symbolic quality of monuments is Iman Issa. The artist mines the interplay between personal history, memory and language in *Material for a sculpture commemorating a singer whose singing became a source of unity of disparate and often opposing forces* (2010–2012) from her multipart installation series *Material* consisting of ten discrete pieces. Issa proposes alternative structures for Cairo monuments, which she is familiar with since childhood, without revealing their names or locations. Especially intrigued by monuments' 'limited' and 'simplistic' language, Issa, instead, attributes unique, abstract titles to her proposals. Re-presenting monuments, or in other words, rematerializing them, she brings the potential of stripping a monument off of its predominant histories and commemorative values to our attention.

Santiago Sierra's simple but conceptually powerful work entitled *Conceptual Monument* (2012) is another proposal for a monument. Studying how power structures operate in our everyday lives, Sierra presents a critical approach to the role of monuments in representing and enforcing power. Sierra's 6 million Euro-monument project for the Design Competition for the Leipzig Freedom and Unity Memorial, refused due to its immaterial character, can be considered as a manifesto that calls for a non-authoritarian and collective use and administration of the Leipzig Square. Recently adapted for the 13th Istanbul Biennial allowing Leipzig to be replaced with any given city, *Conceptual Monument* evokes a reconsideration of the intertwined space-power relations and what it means for us to be in complete control of a public space.

Similar to Sierra's work, Seher Shah's *Mammoth: Aerial Landscape proposals* (2012) proposes potential monuments that physically do not exist. Through spatial and temporal explorations into landscapes, memory and photographic reconstruction, Shah intentionally intervenes in the original images taken by Randhir Singh. Responding to the visual elements already inherent in these aerial views, the artist inserts monumental figures or 'objects' in them through processes of erasure, repetition and abstraction. While she deletes spaces of memory, Shah not only invites us to think about the relationship of slightly eerie areas of ambiguity and forgetting, but also subtly calls for an understanding of monuments beyond history.

Working across different histories and geographies, *Proposals on Monumentality* offers possible scenarios and alternative perceptions for monuments. Both Christian Jankowski and Aslı Çavuşoğlu make specific references to historical monuments: the former humorously suggests a need to fight or challenge history, while the latter rephrases the fragile story of a long-gone memorial. Similarly, Amina Menia gazes at the often-forgotten (and sometimes ignored or harmed) monuments as she draws on Nietzsche: 'the past must be forgotten if it is not to become the gravedigger of the present.' While Seher Shah demonstrates a formal exploration into monumentality through strong visual gestures, Iman Issa and Santiago Sierra present alternative structures through abstracting an existing monument and imagining a new one respectively.

As architecture receives increasing significance in the Gulf, iconic landmark buildings and large-scale museum projects – both agents of urban branding – are popularly described as 'monuments'. Moreover, the development and redevelopment of cities, in other words constant flux of urban fabric, lead to feelings of dislocation and even spatial amnesia. In light of the region's changing political context and urban environment, it is much needed to revisit monumentality's complex relation to memory as well as spatial and political dynamics.

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Notes for Editors:

Aslı Çavuşoğlu (born 1982, Istanbul, Turkey) received her BFA from Marmara University, Istanbul. Recent solo shows include *The Stones Talk*, ARTER, Istanbul, (2013) and *Murder in Three Acts*, Delfina Foundation, London (2013); Recent group shows include *The Crime Was Almost Perfect*, Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art, Rotterdam (2014) and *Signs Taken in Wonder*, MAK Museum, Vienna, (2013); Frieze Projects, London (2012); 11th Baltic Triennial of International Art, Vilnius (2012); Performa11, New York (2011) and *Seven New Works*, Borusan Contemporary, Istanbul (2011). She lives and works in Istanbul.

Iman Issa (born 1979, Cairo, Egypt) received her BFA from the American University in Cairo, and MFA from Columbia University, New York. Recent group and solo exhibitions include the 8th Berlin Biennale, Berlin (2014), *Meeting Points*, MuHKA, Antwerp (2013); *Iman Issa*, Tensta Konsthall, Spånga (2013); *The Ungovernables*, New Museum, New York (2012); *Seeing is Believing*, KW Institute of Contemporary Art, Berlin (2011); *Material*, Rodeo, Istanbul (2011); *Short Stories*, SculptureCenter, New York (2011) and *Propoganda by Monuments*, Contemporary Image Collective, Cairo (2011). In 2012 Issa was awarded the inaugural HNF-MACBA Award. She lives in Cairo and New York.

Christian Jankowski (born 1968, Göttingen, Germany) studied at the Academy of fine Arts, Hamburg. Recent solo exhibitions include *During the Day Most People are Awake*, Proyectos Monclova, Mexico City (2014); *Heavy Weight History*, Lisson Gallery, London, and CCA Tel Aviv (both 2014) and CCA Ujazdowski Castle, Warsaw (2013); *The Eye of Dubai*, TRAFO, Szczecin, and The Pavilion Downtown, Dubai (both 2013); *Discourse News*, Friedrich Petzel Gallery, New York (2012); *Casting Jesus*, MACRO – Museo d'Arte Contemporanea Roma, Rome (2012); *Crying for the March of Humanity*, Sala de Arte Publico Siqueiros, Mexico City (2012) and *Casting Jesus*, Lisson Gallery, London (2011). Selected group exhibitions include Venice Biennale (2013, and 1999); *Project Los Altos: SFMOMA in Silicon Valley*, Los Altos (2013); Taipei and Sydney Biennials (both 2010) and *Dienstbesprechung*, Kunstmuseum Stuttgart (2008). He lives and works in Berlin.

Amina Menia (born 1976, Algiers, Algeria) graduated from Ecole Supérieure des Beaux-Arts of Algiers. Selected solo exhibitions include *Un Écorché*, Art-cade – Galerie des Grands Bains Douches de la Plaine, Marseilles (2013) and *Extra Muros, Chapter 1*, Bastion 23 Art Center, Algiers (2005). Recent group exhibitions include Folkestone Triennial, UK (2014); *Alger/Marseilles, Allers et retours*, MuCEM – Museum for European and Mediterranean Civilizations, Marseilles (2014); Art Dubai Projects, Dubai (2014); Dak'Art Biennale, Dakar (2014); Sharjah Biennial 11, Sharjah (2013); *Becoming Independent*, Royal Hibernian Academy, Dublin (2013); *Le Pont*, Museum of Contemporary Art of Marseilles (2013); *Native Nostalgia*, Museum of African Design, Johannesburg (2013); Visual Arts Festival Damascus, Depo, Istanbul (2013); *Chkoun Ahna*, National Museum of Carthage, Tunisia (2012). She lives and works in Algiers.

Seher Shah (born 1975 Karachi, Pakistan) received her Bachelor of Fine Arts and Bachelor of Architecture from the Rhode Island School of Design. Recent solo exhibitions include *30 / 60 / 90*, Jhaveri Contemporary, Mumbai (2013); *Constructed Landscapes*, AMOA-Arthouse, Austin (2013), *Radiant Lines*, Nature Morte, Berlin (2012); and *Brute Ornament*, two-person exhibition with Kamrooz Aram at Green Art Gallery, Dubai (2012). Selected group exhibitions include *Below Another Sky*, Glasgow Print Studio, Glasgow (as part of Scottish Print Network residency, 2014); *Multiplicity*, Invisible-Exports, New York, (2014); *The Language of Human Consciousness*, Athr Gallery, Jeddah (2014); *Observed Ratios*, The James Gallery at CUNY Graduate Center, New York (2013); *Decenter: An exhibition on the Centenary of the 1913 Armory Show*, Abrons Art Center, New York (2013); *Radical Terrain*, Rubin Museum of Art, New York (2012); *Lines of Control*, Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, New York (2012); *Drawing 2011: Biennial*, Drawing Room, London (2011); *Eccentric Architecture and Generation 1.5* at the Queens Museum of Art, New York (2011); *On Rage*, Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin (2010); *21: Selections of Contemporary Art*, Brooklyn Museum, New York (2008). She lives and works in New York.

Santiago Sierra (born 1966, Madrid, Spain) received his BFA from Complutense University Madrid. Selected solo exhibitions include *Jens Haaning / Santiago Sierra*, Faurschou Foundation, Copenhagen (2014); *Veterans*, Team Gallery, New York (2013); *40 m3 of Earth from the Iberian Peninsula*, KOW, Berlin (2013); *Los Encargados*, Helga de Alvear, Madrid (2013); *Hafnarhus*, Reykjavik Art Museum, Iceland (2012); *Santiago Sierra*, Lisson Gallery, London (2012); *No-Global Tour*, ARTIUM Centro-Museo de Art Contemporaneo Basco, Victoria (2011) and American University Museum, Washington D.C. (2010); *Santiago Sierra*, Magasin3 Stockholm Konstall (2009); *Haus im Schlamm*, Kestnergesellschaft, Hannover (2005); and Spanish Pavillion, 50th Venice Biennale (2003). Recent group exhibitions include *Smart New World*, Kunsthalle Düsseldorf (2014); Istanbul Biennial (2013); *Tireless Refrain*, Nam Jun Paik Art Centre, Korea (2012) The Welcome Trust, London (2011); Performa09, New York (2009); *The Living Currency*, Tate Modern, London (2008). He lives and works in Madrid.

Born and raised in Istanbul, Turkey, **İpek Ulusoy Akgül** is a curator and writer currently based in Dubai. At the *A.i.R Dubai* residency's 2014 edition, İpek curated an open studio exhibition showing projects by five international and Emirati artists. Having previously served as the curatorial associate at Borusan Contemporary, Istanbul, coordinating new media exhibitions and commissions, she has worked at various museums and arts organizations such as The Whitney Museum of American Art and Independent Curators International (iCI) in New York, as well as the 9th and 10th Istanbul Biennials, Sabancı Museum and Galeri Mana in Istanbul. Her writings appeared in Artforum.com, Istanbul Art News, Harper's Bazaar Art Arabia, m-est.org among others. Recipient of Fulbright Scholarship, İpek earned her MA in Museum Studies from NYU and BA in Cultural Studies from Sabancı University, Istanbul.

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