

Salon

Spring

2024

אלעאלם
כג'אור-זרה
פי כף אליד

العالم
كجولك
فلي كفا اليد

the world like a jewel in the hand

unlearning imperial plunder ii



a film by
Ariella Aïsha Azoulay

02.22.24

7 - 9pm

Visual Studies Workshop • 31 Prince Street Rochester, NY • Suggested: \$10

VSW Salon – Spring 2024
February 22

The world like a jewel in the hand: Unlearning imperial plunder ii

with Ariella Aïsha Azoulay

Ariella Aïsha Azoulay is an artist, filmmaker, author, curator and theorist of visual culture. For more than ten years, her work has focused on developing and demonstrating potential history, a radical concept that contends with imperial violence and erasure. Azoulay defines potential history as “a form of being with others, both living and dead, across time” and “against the separation of the past from the present, colonized peoples from their worlds and possessions, and history from politics.” *The world like a jewel in the hand* (2022) is a sequel in a series titled, *Unlearning imperial plunder*. In the first film of this series, *Un-Documented* (2019), Azoulay connects the lives of plundered objects held within western museums with the lives of migrants seeking asylum inside the borders of their former colonizing nations. Azoulay states, “The first migration is of the objects, generating professional care, scrupulous documentation, and generous hospitality in museums and archives: they are the (relatively) well-documented. The second migration is of people who do not have the documents that would allow them access to care and hospitality, and the documents they need to rebuild their homes and worlds.” Azoulay positions this film in opposition to the 1953 film *Statues Also Die*, directed by Alain Resnais, Ghislain Cloquet and Chris Marker. In *Statues also Die*, the narrator begins by saying, “When men die, they enter

into history. When statues die, they enter into art.” Azoulay argues that these statues, these objects are not only alive, but they “can be reclaimed and the rights inscribed in them renewed.”

In *The world like a jewel in the hand*, Azoulay demonstrates this reclamation from the perspective of her own migration and ancestral history beginning with Spain’s expulsion of Jews and Muslims in 1492 to Northern Africa. The film follows Azoulay through her exhibition *Errata* at the Fundació Antoni Tàpies in Barcelona. Azoulay interacts with maps, books, and Algerian colonial ephemera, “not as sealed and unalterable visual and textual account of the ‘past’, but rather as elements that can still be rejected, re-composed, amended, reversed, erased and reclaimed.”

Azoulay states:

Before the colonization of North Africa by the French, this was the world of my ancestors. The film insists on my – our – right to refuse to conceive this world as over. Speaking in the first person, and in collaboration with [Algerian singer and percussionist] Nadia Ammour who sings and reads part of the narrative, the film invites us all into the multi-pronged project of ‘unlearning imperial plunder.’ In it, we examine catalogues and books, alter and re-contextualize troubling

photos by juxtaposing them with information about the circumstances of the plunder, watch an excerpt from the film The Battle of Algiers, pierce coins from which Jewish jewelers used to make jewels, and respond to the call of our Jewish ancestors in the Muslim world who, in the late 1940s, urged their fellow Jews (who spoke, feared, and dreamed in Arabic) to resist the European Zionist campaign to destroy Palestine, and with it the entire Jewish Muslim world. Speaking as an Algerian Jew, I use the camera to question, and thus refuse, the way Algerian Jews, like other Jews who live(d) in other Muslim countries, were transformed into an extinct species. Though museums reinforce their extinction by displaying their plundered objects as artifacts of a bygone world, through their objects, our ancestors inhabit these museums and await us to resist the ongoing course of their extinction. The film turns these objects, which are usually conceived and displayed as specimen of an irretrievable “past,” into calls to refuse the impositions of imperialism and racial capitalism – including the imposition of “History.” Books, written and unwritten orders, archival documents, photographs, postcards, treaties and declarations, serve as the sites where imperial triumph is declared. The violence entwined with such a triumph is celebrated as the throes of history. But instead of accepting the verdict and treating these documents as sealed or these objects as pieces of art and relics of “history,” the film presents them as invitations to resistance, reinterpretation, and reclamation of a world deemed “lost.”



Ariella Aïsha Azoulay, *The world like a jewel in the hand—unlearning imperial plunder ii*, 2022 (film still). Single-channel digital video, color, sound, 58m.

About Ariella Aïsha Azoulay:

Ariella Aïsha Azoulay is an artist, filmmaker, author, curator and theorist of visual culture. She is a Professor of Modern Culture and Media at Brown University and the author of numerous texts such as *La Résistance des Bijoux/ The Resistance of Jewelry* (Rot-Bo-Krik 2023), *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism* (Verso 2019), *From Palestine to Israel: A Photographic Record of Destruction and State Formation, 1947–50* (Pluto Press 2011), and *The Civil Contract of Photography* (Zone Books 2008). *The world like a jewel in the hand – Unlearning imperial plunder ii* is Azoulay’s fifth film, which also recently screened last summer as a part of the exhibition *In the Inner Bark of Trees* at Archive Sites in Berlin, Germany.

Visual Studies Workshop nurtures experimental and expansive approaches to photography and media arts,

and builds community among artists and the public through exhibitions, publications and residencies.

The VSW Salon is a bi-monthly engagement in the VSW microcinema featuring film screenings, artist talks, Community Curator events, performances, photo presentations and conversations. VSW Salon showcases the work of local and national artists, and invites them to present their work in an intimate “microcinema” equipped to show 16mm, Super 8, digital photography and video on state of the art equipment.



Council on the Arts

NATIONAL ENDOWMENT for the ARTS
arts.gov

The VSW Salon is made possible by the New York State Council on the Arts and by the ArtWorks program of the National Endowment for the Arts.

LONG LIVE EXPERIMENTAL CINEMA

VSW envisions a society that values the human need to create and share ideas.



31 Prince Street, Rochester, NY

Learn more at

v s w . o r g