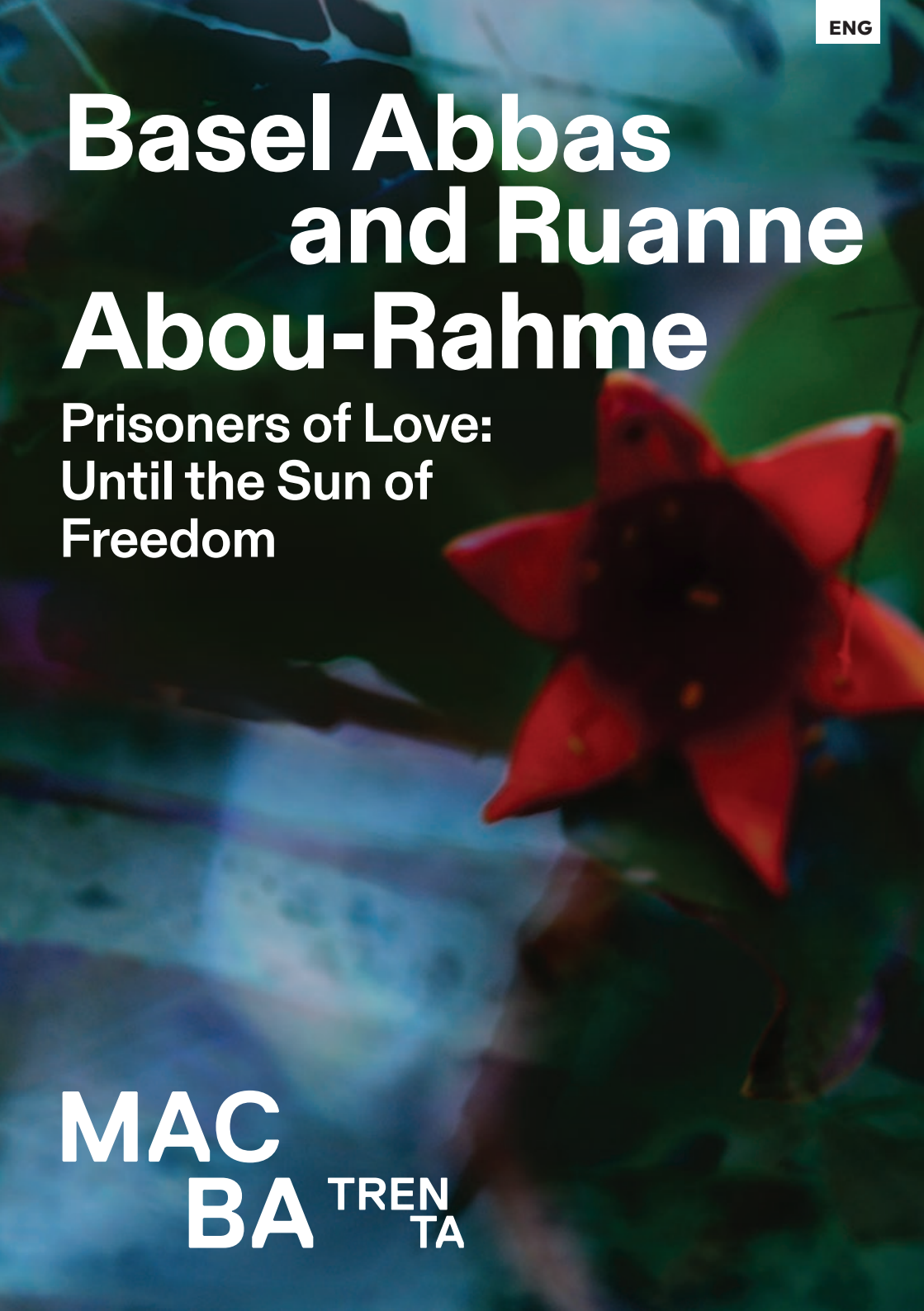
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Basel Abbas and Ruanne Abou-Rahme

Prisoners of Love: Until the Sun of Freedom



MAC BA TRENTA

You may take the last strip of my land,
Feed my youth to prison cells.
You may plunder my heritage.
...
I shall not compromise.
And to the last pulse in my veins
I shall resist.

Excerpt from "Enemy of the Sun" by Samih al-Qasim, 1970

The Palestinian artists Basel Abbas (b. 1983, Nicosia, Cyprus) and Ruanne Abou-Rahme (b. 1983, Boston, USA), based between New York and Ramallah, have collaborated since 2007 across image, sound, text and performance. Through collecting, sampling and layering of found and self-produced materials, their multidisciplinary practice excavates, activates and resituates stories of violence and disenfranchisement, questioning how the present is shaped, remembered and imagined.

Central to their practice is a non-linear approach to storytelling. Drawing on notions of amnesia and déjà vu, the artists create slippages between past and present, reality and imagination, familiarity and alienation. What the artists describe as "poetics of resistance" emerges through interruptions, repetition and overlap, opening spaces of resonance in which histories do not settle but remain active, unstable and insistently present.

Prisoners of Love: Until the Sun of Freedom is the artists' first exhibition in Spain. It centres on the eponymous audiovisual installation, informed by their most recent research, which explores the resilience of former Palestinian prisoners through song and poetry. The work is co-commissioned by MACBA, Nottingham Contemporary, The Bell/Brown Arts Institute, Brown University, and Kunstinstituut Melly, and forms part of the MACBA Collection.

Presented alongside earlier works, the exhibition traces a trajectory across nearly two decades of practice, revealing a sustained engagement with the poetics and politics of memory, and with struggles against dispossession and oppression in Palestine and beyond.



Basel Abbas & Ruanne Abou-Rahme: *Prisoners of Love: Until the Sun of Freedom*, 2025, Installation view at Nottingham Contemporary. Photo: Michael Pollard. Courtesy of Nottingham Contemporary.

***Prisoners of Love: Until the Sun of Freedom* (2025-2026)**

Prisoners of Love: Until the Sun of Freedom is an immersive multimedia installation that takes as its point of departure the long history of Palestinian dispossession and incarceration from the Nakba of 1948 to the present. It draws on Abbas and Abou-Rahme's research into the experiences of imprisoned Palestinians, and how their spirits and political struggle have endured under the harsh conditions of incarceration. Through first-hand recordings and testimonies gathered across the occupied West Bank, the installation weaves together the voices of former detainees with poems and texts by scholars and revolutionary thinkers—some of whom have themselves been imprisoned —as well as by the artists, reflecting on confinement, resilience and justice under regimes of occupation and oppression.

These voices form a polyphonic, non-linear narrative that speaks not only to the physical and psychological hardships of imprisonment, but also to moments of tenderness, joy and creative resistance. Poetry and song emerge as vital practices through which prisoners reclaim agency, becoming critical modes of survival that sustain inner freedom even under conditions designed to extinguish it.

In the film, a woman recalls singing a song she learned in prison, its lyrics wishing the prison into ruin. She describes how, despite being punished with solitary confinement for singing, it was worth the joy and laughter it brought to her and her fellow inmates. Another prisoner recounts singing as a means of communication with others.

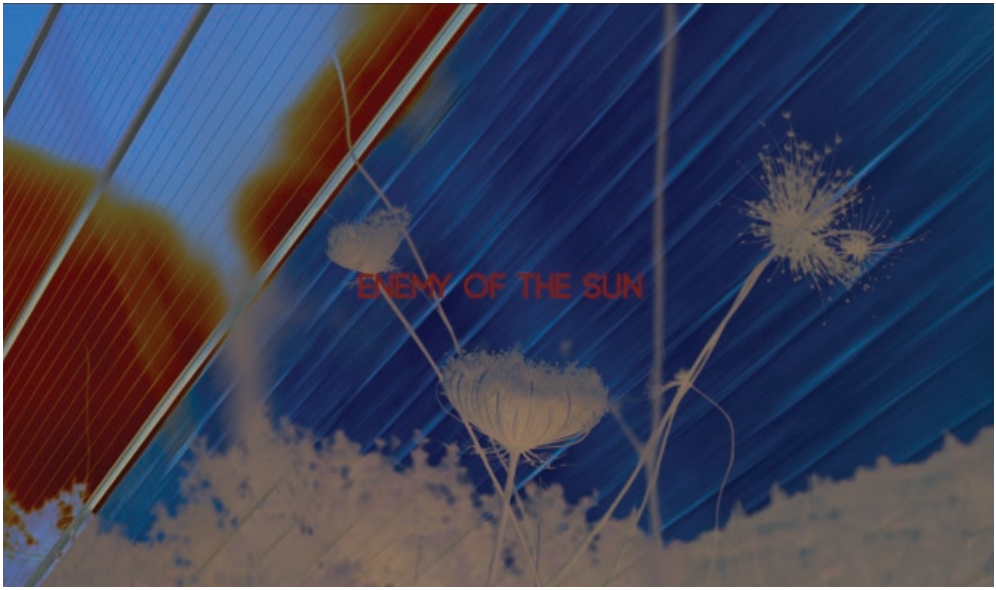
> "To take advantage of the opening of the aperture [of the cell door], we would sing when it was opened.

> I would call to a girl in cell 1 from cell 7, where I was.... When the aperture was closed, we would try to sing through the bottom of the door. Because the corridor was large, the voice would echo and spread from the first cell to the last."

The installation unfolds across multiple spaces. The first envelops the viewer in an environment comprising a labyrinth of metallic panels bearing photographs and black-and-white drawings by the late Tawfik Abou-Rahme, Ruanne Abou-Rahme's father, which evoke a sense of sombreness and trauma. Alongside these are documents, letters and poems in English and Arabic. Some of the same imagery is printed on sheer fabric suspended from the ceiling, its translucency lending a latent spectral quality to them. A projection saturates a screen composed of an array of panels that fracture the moving images. At times fragmented and rendered as negatives, the images of the drawings, landscapes and bodies are repeated across these multiple surfaces, lingering between presence and absence.

Some of these latent images reappear with renewed intensity in the adjacent room, where a three-channel film recounts the stories of prisoners, interlaced with images of the surrounding environment. Footage of the landscape beyond the prison walls is present throughout the film, allowing sound and memory to seep outward, beyond confinement. The presence of native flora—particularly the purple thistle, a resilient perennial capable of growing in dry, rocky soil—emerges as a powerful metaphor for Palestinian endurance and resilience under adverse conditions, underscoring the inseparable connection between people and land.

The installation's visual and sonic logic echoes this seepage. Projected images



Basel Abbas and Ruanne Abou-Rahme, Still from *Prisoners of Love: Until the Sun of Freedom*, 2025. Courtesy of the artists.

resist containment, overflowing their frames and spilling across screens, panels and fabric scrolls. The sound composition is dense, enveloping and insistent, filling the rooms and reverberating through the body. The result is a multisensory experience that is both intimate and overwhelming, inviting viewers to watch, listen and feel.

Closely related to the notions of overflow and seepage is the idea of the "negative", which recurs throughout the work and the artists' wider practice and thinking. "Being the negative, to move between space, of bypassing, of breaking out of these walls" are words that appear in the film. The artists describe this state as a mode of refusal, enacted by inhabiting what has been negated and transforming it into a site of possibility. To exist in the negative is to occupy a space of denial, erasure and constraint—yet it is from within this space of lack that alternative forms of life and imagination emerge. This concept materialises through inverted images, voices that persist despite attempts at silencing, and songs that seep through doors and walls. The negative, therefore, is not framed as an absence but as a generative position: one that moves through and beyond imposed limits, where resistance takes shape through repetition, mutation and endurance.

Complementing the main rooms of the installation is a new, site-specific series of prints and projections presented in cell-like niches. These works explore writing—a process central to the artists' practice—as both a space for inhabiting memory and an act of resistance, even when pen and paper are denied



Basel Abbas and Ruanne Abou-Rahme, Still from *Prisoners of Love: Until the Sun of Freedom*, 2025. Courtesy of the artists.

in prison. Accompanying them is a transient sound composition inspired by the ways in which voices and songs travel between prison cells.

Like songs, texts are fugitive. They have the capacity to move between spaces and bodies, unconfined by time. As S describes:

> "Your journey with prison and your relationship with prison begin afterwards. They begin with how you produce after detention. And here I am writing, and to this day I am writing, and to this day there are things I keep remembering."

The final cell recounts the transnational journey of the poem *Enemy of the Sun* by the Palestinian poet Samih al-Qasim. For decades, following its publication in the *Black Panther Intercommunal News Service*, the poem was mistakenly attributed to Black Panther revolutionary George Jackson after a handwritten copy was found in his prison cell following his assassination in 1971. When the error came to light, it was understood as a powerful bond between

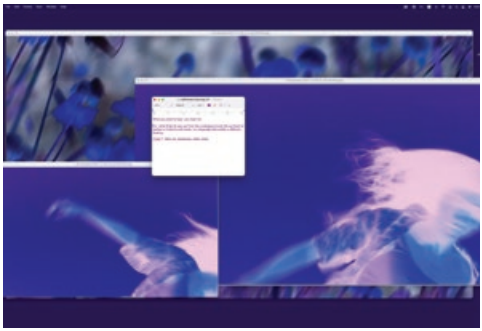
Black and Palestinian struggles—a testament to shared languages of resistance that transcend borders and contexts.

Like the actions of the Palestinian Prisoners Movement—through which prisons became sites of collective learning, resistance, and political consciousness—the installation explores how song and poetry can resonate beyond physical boundaries, becoming transformative forces that sustain hope and affirm joy in life under impossible conditions.

***Screenshots* (2014 - ongoing) and *Desktop Performances* (2021 - ongoing)**

Connecting *Prisoners of Love* with *Collapse* is a selection of *Screenshots* and *Desktop Performances*, works that foreground the artists' research processes and the infrastructural conditions through which images and sounds circulate online. Condensed into the space of the computer screen, these works reveal how image, text and sound coexist in provisional, layered constellations during moments of research and editing.

Like their audiovisual installations, these processes are non-linear and accumulative, linking multiple narratives and sources through juxtaposition and repetition. Here, the desktop becomes both a workspace and a stage, where fragments of history, media and personal annotation intersect. By presenting these materials within the exhibition space, Abbas and Abou-Rahme expose the often invisible labour of gathering, sampling and recombining that underpins their practice. *Screenshots* and *Desktop Performances* function as methodological bridges, emphasising that the circulation of images—through archives, online platforms and personal devices—is itself a site of political and affective meaning.



El título de esta en particular es: Basel Abbas i Ruanne Abou-Rahme. *Screenshot 2021-12-06 at 8.39.12 PM*. Courtesy of the artists

***Collapse* (2009)**

Collapse, the artists' first collaborative work, is a meditation on the resonance between real and imagined moments of resistance and loss. Whereas *Prisoners of Love* is grounded in newly recorded testimonies, *Collapse* is constructed from layered fragments of black-and-white archival footage, both fictional and documentary. It draws on films such as Henry Barakat's *The Open Door* (1963), Sergei Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* (1925), Gillo Pontecorvo's *The Battle of Algiers* (1966) and *In Search of Palestine: Edward Said's Return Home* (1998).

The video opens with an ambiguous image of a woman, floating, falling or suspended, setting the tone for a work shaped by uncertainty and disorientation. Gestures are isolated and repeated: bodies running, fleeing, caught mid-action. These suspended

movements evoke panic, urgency and displacement, while resisting a straightforward narrative. As the video progresses, images become increasingly blurred and unfocused, suggesting the erosion of historical clarity and the instability of memory itself.

Through strategies of sampling, layering and repetition, the work collapses time, geographies, narratives and distinctions between reality and fiction. Past struggles echo within the present, revealing how trauma reverberates across generations and how histories of resistance refuse to remain confined to the past.

Across *Collapse, Screenshots, Desktop Performances,* and *Prisoners of Love: Until the Sun of Freedom*, Abbas and Abou-Rahme present a practice that bears witness to the unjust realities of dispossession and oppression, then and now, while emphasising the importance of joy, love and collective imagination as powerful forms of resistance, even—and especially—under dire conditions. Through poetic articulations of remembering, witnessing and resisting, their work enables voices, songs, sound and images to permeate, seep and endure, refusing silence and erasure.



Basel Abbas and Ruanne Abou-Rahme, Still from *Collapse*, 2009. Courtesy of the artists.

Exhibition curated by: Hiuwai Chu, Head of Exhibitions at MACBA Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona.

If you'd rather listen

The explanations of curators and artists will accompany you through the exhibition, thanks to MACBA's free digital guide.

Listen to Basel Abbas and Ruanne Abou-Rahme on the RWM (Radio Web MACBA) FONS AUDIO #65 podcast.

Experience it differently

Tours
From 22 February
Sundays at 12.30 pm
Led by Agnes Essonti Luque,
Albert Gironès and Eva Paià

Free activity. Register in advance.
Further information at **macba.cat**.

Opening Hours

Monday to Friday: 11.00 am to 7.30 pm (from 25/06 to 24/09: 10.00 am to 8.00 pm).
Saturdays: 10.00 am to 8.00 pm.
Sundays: 10.00 am to 3.00 pm.
Free admission: First Sunday of the month. Closed on Tuesdays (except public holidays). Public holidays: check website.

MACBA Evenings
Free admission on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays from 6 pm to 8 pm (from 25 June to 24 September).

Museum tickets are valid for one month. Activate yours at reception and return as many times as you like.

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