

Dala Nasser

Cemetery of Martyrs

07.02-10.05.26

Cemetery of Martyrs by Dala Nasser (b. 1990, Beirut, Lebanon) transforms the exhibition space into a symbolic graveyard - a collective site of mourning, remembrance, and reflection. By using the technique of frottage alongside cyanotype photographic printing processes, Nasser presents a constellation of paintings that honour the graves of influential artists, writers, poets, filmmakers, historians, and journalists across Lebanon, Egypt, Jordan, and England who dreamt of and fought for cultural, social, and political independence.

For this new commission, Nasser has embodied the role of archivist, architect and cartographer to chart, document and configure a space to unearth and gather buried voices of the past. Black and green mourning

fabrics dyed and marked with natural elements from the earth – shells, seeds, ash, and crushed malachite - are layered amongst cyan blue and charcoal black fabrics. Charcoal rubbings transcribe the surfaces of known tombs, with cyanotype treated fabrics featuring names in Arabic written in sand, representing those whose graves are unreachable or unknown. The fabrics are draped over a wooden trellis in a gridded formation that echoes the walkways and rows of a graveyard. An immersive soundscape featuring field recordings collected from cemeteries grounds us in a familiar yet obscure site, further enveloping visitors in a space of remembrance. Nasser's exploration into alternative forms of image making with natural materials marks a connection between the land as witness to histories forgotten or lost, and the importance of mark making – of documenting – to ensure important legacies prevail.

The exhibition commemorates cultural figures from the Arab Renaissance, or Nahda, in the mid-nineteenth

century, through to the present day whose work and ideas resisted political domination and occupation. This era unfolded primarily within Arab regions of the Ottoman Empire, when the Ottomans sought to bridge east and west by imposing a series of reforms on their subjects. In retaliation to this control, new creative and intellectual currents were generated by those who sought to reform sovereignty (the authority of a state to rule over its own territory and its people) by placing moral and legal limits on imperial authority (the control and domination of the empire). Central to this shift was the notion that people were to be recognised as citizens with rights, rather than subjects of empire. These ideas were further cultivated by emerging technologies, namely the printing press, newspapers, modern literature and the study of art and science. With these new conditions, liberatory and independent thinking were able to flourish, and self-determination (the right to live free from foreign rule) became a hallmark of revolutionary ideas across West Asia.

Figures honoured in *Cemetery of Martyrs* range from Lebanese-born Ottoman writer and journalist, Ahmad Faris al-Shidyaq (b. 1806, Beirut, d. 1887, Istanbul) to the pioneering Palestinian visual artist Laila Shawa (b. 1940, Gaza, d. 2022, London), often referred to as the “Mother of Arabic Revolutionary Art”. Nasser traces histories of the deceased and their legacies through place, natural materials and process; a spiritual act to further connect to voices of the past. While each rubbing is a poetic, affective transcription or reconstruction of a grave, they also function as traces of the artist’s body in motion, of the physicality and labour required to excavate and reproduce cultural memory. Referring to these figures as martyrs draws attention to the rejection and persecution of their names, stories and ideas by colonial and Eurocentric frameworks that have previously obscured or erased. Accompanying the exhibition is a booklet featuring individual obituaries to honour each figure, recording their legacies in

memoriam as a means of preservation beyond the physical cemetery.

In seeking to mend what history has left undone, *Cemetery of Martyrs* is a place to mourn, learn, and reaffirm the power of culture and humanity to connect us to histories of resistance and renewal, finding hope in the past to forge new pathways of thought and action for the future.

RELATED EVENTS

WALKTHROUGHS

Tue 17 Feb, 12pm

Welcome Walkthrough

Explore the exhibition with our team, followed by a creative workshop with Associate Artist Amelia Daiz.

Wed 25 Feb, 1pm

Curators' Walkthrough

Join Nottingham Contemporary's curators, Katie Simpson and Niall Ó Faircheallaigh for a tour of our spring exhibitions.

Wed 8 Apr, 1pm

BSL Walkthrough

With Zoe Milner, deaf and visual artist.

Wed 29 Apr, 1pm

With Reuben Hutchinson-Wong, Ancient Historian.

12.30 Talks

12.30pm every Tue, Thu, Sat

and Sun, starting Tue 17 Feb

Join one of our friendly Gallery Assistants for a short exploration of one of our current exhibitions.

WORKSHOPS

Wed 15 Apr, 1pm

With Winter Beaumont, Artist and Occultist.

FILM SCREENING

Two Lenses on Beirut, Curated by Emma Bouraba.

Thu 26 Mar, 6pm

Screening of Nahla, dir. Farouk Beloufa.

Thu 30 Apr, 6pm

Screening of A Letter from Beirut, dir. Jocelyne Saab.

ARTIST TALK

Sat 2 May, 2pm

In conversation with Dala Nasser.

For more information about the exhibition, related events and learning programmes, visit nottinghamcontemporary.org or scan here:



This exhibition was made possible thanks to the generous support of:

The Henry Moore Foundation

The Dala Nasser Exhibition Circle: Mai Eldib, Zaza Jabre, Cherine Magrabi and Maria Sukkar.

The Nottingham Contemporary Commissioning Circle: Nissreen Darawish, Gabriela Galcerán, Il Posto, Rafik&Najoua, Hamza Serafi and Mercedes Vilardell.

Cemetery of Martyrs is produced and commissioned by Nottingham Contemporary in collaboration with KM21 The Hague, Netherlands and Peer Gallery, London, UK where the exhibition will be presented during 2026.

This exhibition is curated by Katie Simpson and Klara Szafrńska.

Works courtesy of the artist and Commonwealth and Council.

Architects: MÜLLERAPRAHAMIAN.

Research: Rayyan Abdelkhalek, Nadi Abu Saada.

Production assistants: Rayyan Abdelkhalek, Jawad Al Amin, Müller Industries.

Sound design and composition: Mhamad Safa.

Special thanks to Chbib Al Amin.

**Exhibition build and installation by
Helen Bartholomew, Jon Chambers, Billy Hughes,
Craig Humpston, Jack Narewski, Craig David Parr,
Emily Stollery, Hannah Templeman and David Thomas.**

Exhibition graphics by Waste Studio.

Nottingham Contemporary is a registered charity and dependent on the generosity of our visitors, partners and supporters.

If you would like to use any alternative forms of interpretation, we have a range of accessible versions on our Access Wall beside Reception or alongside the wall text in the exhibition.