

A child is seen from behind, sitting on a blue and yellow playground structure. The child is wearing a black headscarf and a black top. The structure has yellow handrails. In the background, another child is visible on a green structure. Overlaid on the image are three dark blue rectangular banners with pink dot-matrix text. The text reads 'WELFARE' on the top banner, 'WELFARE' on the middle banner, and 'LAND' on the bottom banner.

WELFARE

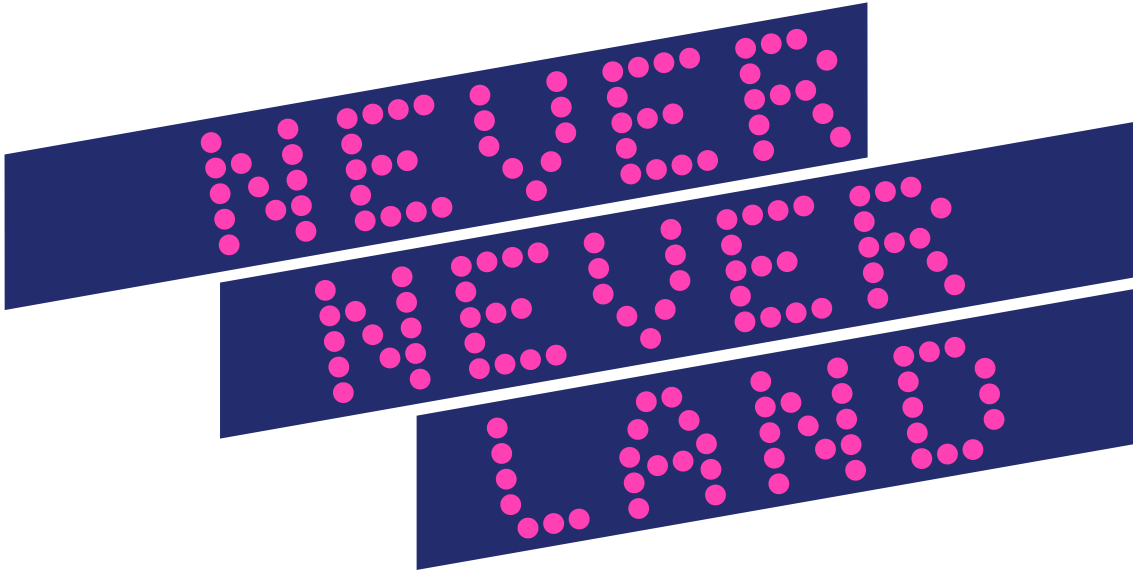
WELFARE

LAND

29 NOV 2014 –  
31 JAN 2015

EOA.P

ABDULLAH AL MUTAIRI  
ARWA AL NEAMI  
MONIRA AL QADIRI  
FOUNDLAND  
HASAN HUJARI  
AHMED MATER



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## Introduction

29 NOV 2014 - 31 JAN 2015

In countries where activism is curtailed and overt social critique is frowned upon, the rebellion inherent in humor is particularly valuable and powerful. Where censorship is widespread, satire, parody, and humour are often the best or only means available to air opinions, voice dissent, or challenge societal norms and taboos.

*Never Never Land* features short films, animations, posters, photographs and installations from Abdullah Al Mutairi, Arwa Al Neami, Monira Al Qadiri, Foundland, Hasan Hujairi, and Ahmed Mater. It will present a new perspective on the region and takes its title from a body of work by Arwa Al Neami, shot in a theme park 'Mahrajan Abha' in Abha, Saudi Arabia which has a restrictive set of rules which forbids screaming and shouting on rides.

Arwa Al Neami  
From series *Never  
Never Land*

"Mahrajan Abha strictly forbids you from lifting your abaya, exposing your trousers or shouting while on the ride. Offenders will be immediately removed should they not comply."

The works in the show subvert mass media formats and official communiqués such as music videos, game shows, advertisements, religious public service murals and pedagogical exercises as well as fashion. Here, preconceptions and stereotypes are parodied and challenged; and these mainstream tropes are subverted and re-appropriated with both an irreverence and thoughtfulness.

*Never Never Land* reflects on a history of political satire in the region, an example being Kuwaiti satirical theatre produced in the decade after the oil boom of 1973, which heralded the beginning of the end of a period of strong Pan-Arab solidarity and political engagement. This ideological reversal was so swift that only humor could express the bizarre experience of simultaneous economic abundance and political enfeeblement. In the contemporary moment of digital connectivity it has never been so fast to broadcast a joke (or a critique). Following on from satirical theatre plays, came satellite TV shows such as *Tash ma Tash* from Saudi Arabia and with mobile phones came a wide circulation of videos and images on bluetooth networks and today a huge network of YouTube channels, blogs and Instagram accounts. So, how does one stand down ubiquitous surveillance? An image, video or artwork can sum up the follies of an era with a lightning-quick precision unavailable to even the most talented writers or charismatic speaker.

Amal Khalaf

#### AMAL KHALAF

Amal Khalaf is a researcher and curator, currently Projects Curator of the Serpentine Galleries Edgware Road Project. With an MA in Contemporary Art Theory from Goldsmiths, her research addresses themes of urbanism, community, media activism and art through participatory projects, and media initiatives. Previously, she has worked with Al Riwaq Gallery, Bahrain, and participated in setting up an art space in an abandoned railway arch in East London, Hold & Freight (2008-2009).

Every joke is a  
tiny revolution

GEORGE ORWELL

Abdullah Al Mutairi  
*\_ic\_KWT-YTH.flv [HD]*,

2013  
Digital Video  
04:06



## Abdullah Al Mutairi

Abdullah Al Mutairi is an artist and founding member of the GCC, he lives between Kuwait and the United States. He has exhibited at Art Dubai, UAE; Mathaf, Qatar; The Serpentine Gallery, UK; and contributed to Hans-Ulrich Obrist and Simon Castets ongoing digital natives project 89plus. The GCC collective work has been exhibited at MoMA PS1, Fridericianum, New Museum and the Sultan Gallery, among other institutions.

“ربحت معنا!!!” is an ad series that analyzes the concept of the Gulf identity bubble and a sense of entitlement that has plagued the Gulf Arab states post-oil boom in a call-in gameshow’s framework. These popular gameshows act as public pacifying telecasts and distractions from bleak times. →

AD - 4 ربحت معنا!!!

2012  
Digital Video  
0:33

→ Visually, the post-millennium Gulf gameshow utilizes live and 3D animated stock footage to create a futuristic mixture of religion and technology reflecting quintessential Gulf multimedia aesthetics. The advertising inventory typically features angelic rolling clouds clashing with electronic devices and cash over Islamic hymns and “You’re a winner!” shouts. These ads push Westernization and materialism as modernity, tailoring the technique of delivery and overall attitude to entertain the local conservative community. In most cases, simply getting through to the operator of your corresponding Gulf country’s phone number guarantees the caller a valuable prize. “It’s true, the best things in life ARE free! Call in now, you’re already a winner!!!!”

DIS magazine



AD - 1 !!! معانا  
2012  
Digital Video  
0:33



AD - 5 !!! معانا  
2012  
Digital Video  
0:33



AD - 4 !!! معانا  
2012  
Digital Video  
0:33



AD - 2 !!! معانا  
2012  
Digital Video  
0:33



AD - 2 !!! معانا  
2012  
Digital Video  
0:33



\_ic\_KWT-YTH.flv [HD],  
2013  
Digital Video  
04:06



## Arwa Al Neami

Arwa Al Neami was born in Khamis Mushait, Asir province of Saudi Arabia and raised in King Khalid military airbase. Al Neami's work is greatly influenced by her conservative upbringing. In 2005, she received a distinction in a regional art competition under the patronage of HRH Prince Khalid Al Faisal and since then has been part of multiple group shows in Al Miftaha village. She has also taken part in exhibition at venues including Athr Gallery, Al-Furussia Marina and Art Dubai 2014.

Arwa Al Neami presents photographs and video from a body of work entitled *Never Never Land*. Shot in a theme park in Abha, Saudi Arabia the work documents the life of *Mahrajan Abha* and the way that visitors to the fair negotiate a restrictive set of rules and regulations in the theme park which prohibits screaming on rides and 'careless' lifting of abayas.

Arwa Al Neami  
From series *Never  
Never Land*



*Never Never Land II*

2014

Pigment Print  
75 x 112.5 cm



*Never Never Land*

2014

Still from Digital Video  
02:41

*Never Never Land I*

2014

Pigment Print  
180 x 120 cm







*Never Never Land*

2014  
Still from Digital Video  
07:35



## Monira Al Qadiri

Monira Al Qadiri is a Kuwaiti visual artist born in Senegal and educated in Japan. In 2010, she received a Ph.D. in inter-media art from Tokyo University of the Arts. Her work is focused on the aesthetics of sadness, the displacement of cultural and religious identities, and dysfunctional gender roles. She is also a member of the artist collective GCC, who recently held a solo exhibition at MoMA PS1 in New York (2014).

Supported by the  
Arab Fund For Arts  
and Culture (AFAC)

### *Muhawwil (Transformer)*

2014  
4-channel video installation with  
wooden structure and screens  
350 x 350 x 260 cm



آفاق AFAC



*The Falls*

2014  
lightbox  
140 x 210 cm

Historically, the figurative pictorial tradition in the Arabian Gulf is thought to be generally under-developed. This is often attributed to the teachings of Islam that forbade depicting the human figure as it is thought to inspire idolatry, or that the figurative artist is seen to be mimicking the divine craft. In contrast, images of divine words were brought to the forefront, and adorned with all kinds of ornamentation and geometric designs, a deep-rooted calligraphic practice began to flourish. It is this oral and literary art that primarily embodied artistic practices in this region for centuries.

However in the current age of mass-image making, reproduction technology and mobile photography, the threat that the visual image poses on religion seems to have diminished. The old idea of artist as Pygmalion - the artist having the ability to breathe life into inanimate objects - seems to have passed. Visual representations of people and objects are seen everywhere in countless forms, so their effigy cannot possibly be elevated to the realm of the 'sacred.' Or can it?

A curious movement in public art has recently sprung up in Kuwait posing a paradoxical view of what figurative art should look like under a religious light. It takes the form of colorful murals painted on electric power stations (perhaps because of their

plain cube shape), presenting, in the form of images, advice on religious and moral conduct within society. Open seashells, coffee pots, scales and candles are only some of the perplexing motifs used to convey the moral messages intended. Figures of people are also included, but always without faces. These murals are interesting and eye-catching to say the least, and the circumstances with which they are displayed coupled with the unsophisticated nature of the painting itself only adds to the strangeness of their design.

Although they may be artistically discredited as a form of street art or 'art brut,' they could equally be seen as representing a form of Islamic contemporary visual culture: an entity lodged between a system of ancient beliefs and our sensory loaded pop culture. They are advertisements of moral conduct that employ one of the oldest forms of art - wall painting - to display something that is new to Islamic culture in the Gulf: the artistic figurative tradition.

This project explores the meaning and aesthetic qualities that these murals embody by using their maximal affective power - as animated figures, interacting, walking and moving. The motifs used are an exact reproduction of the original murals in form, color and design. The only difference created is their movement.

Monira Al Qadiri





Foundland

Foundland Collective (Ghalia Elsrakbi and Lauren Alexander) is a design, research and art practice, based between Cairo, Egypt and Amsterdam, the Netherlands. The collective's work draws on graphic design, art and writing research in order to formulate research based projects, self-initiated and commissioned. Foundland has presented at many international exhibitions and festivals including Kadist Foundation, Paris (2012), Impakt Festival, Utrecht (2011, 2012), BAK, Utrecht (2012), Damascus Visual Arts Festival, Istanbul (2013). The collective has participated in masterclasses and lecture presentations at Studium Generale ArtEZ, Arnhem, de Appel for Sandberg Institute, Amsterdam, The Royal Academy of Arts, The Hague, Rietveld Academie, Amsterdam and at the Athens Biennial. Their essays and visuals have contributed to international journals such as Open! Magazine (The Netherlands), Krisis Magazine (Italy), Esse Magazine (Canada) and Ibraaz, Middle East online journal. Recent artist residencies include the Townhouse Gallery, Cairo (2013) and ISCP, New York (2014).

*Destination Paradise*

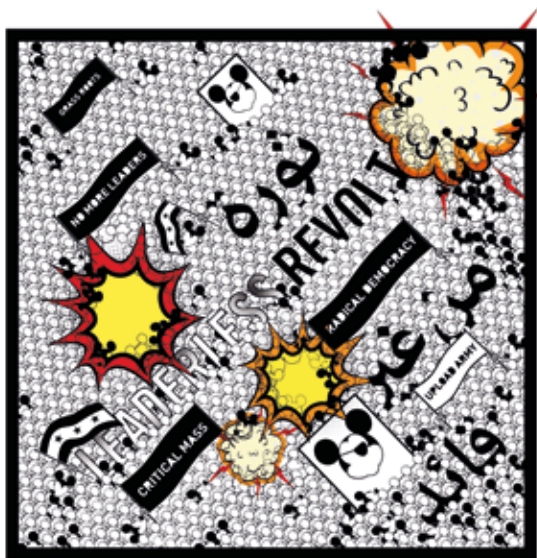
2014  
Print on Silk Satin  
100 x 100 cm

Using the backdrop of a "snakes and ladders" board game, this scarf design reflects binary narratives of good and evil. Religion has come to play a major role in the justification of violence and power control by particular groups in Syria during 2014. Recruitment of young fighting forces is often done through the promise of rewards, be that material or religious. This scarf design investigates various visions of heaven from Islam and Christianity which are offered as rewards, for which ultra-violence is committed.

Keffiyah Dreams is a series of scarf designs which take the traditional Middle Eastern keffiyah patterned scarf as starting point. This square shaped scarf, with distinct black and white woven pattern, was originally worn by farmers throughout the region and used as protection from sand and wind, but today has been adopted as a symbolic scarf representing political resistance. In Keffiyah Dreams, Foundland interrogates the keffiyah pat-

tern as a placeholder symbol for struggle movements, which may ironically defend conflicting ideologies. On the border of fashion and political statement the keffiyah represents a multitude of hopes and dreams for the Arab world. Foundland remixes and plays with icons and representations associated struggle, leadership, displacement and visions of paradise to formulate a collection of alternative keffiyah narratives.

Foundland



**Leaderless Revolt**

2014  
Print on Rayon Viole  
100 x 100 cm

Since 2011, the Syrian opposition movement has witnessed activist leaders and important figures come and go. The leaderless nature of the movement has posed problems for its direction and progress, but has seen development in grassroots organisation and distribution of tasks, usually through online social networks, within a networked swarm of resistance activists both inside and outside of Syria.

**Unexpected Hero**

2014  
Print on Rayon Viole  
100 x 100 cm

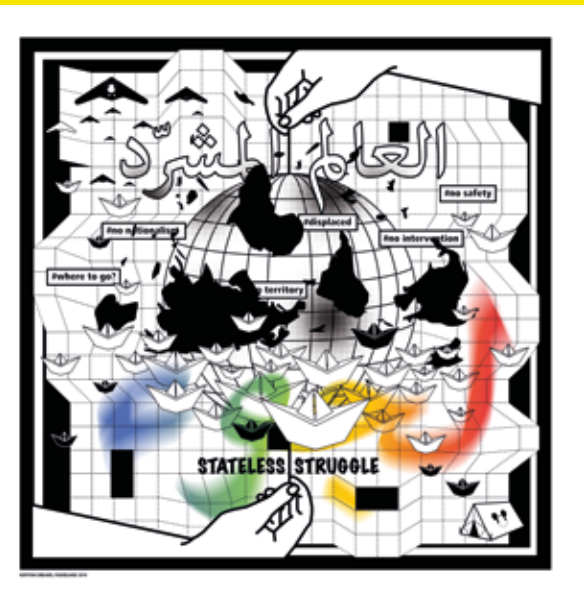
Syrian opposition activists operating on social media make use of avatars in order to conceal their identity. Since 2011, the use of characters appropriated from cartoons and popular culture has been used as alternative profile identity as well as in Syrian opposition campaigns. Foundland noticed that in some cases, cartoon characters are re-narrated to replace the representation of absent political leadership.



**Stateless Struggle**

2014  
Print on Rayon Viole  
100 x 100 cm

Many stateless political groups exist today, such as the Kurdish Women's Movement, fighting in Northern Syria and the Palestinian resistance. Groups fight for the recognition of their identity and re-establishment of its boundaries. Continued violence in Syria, at the hands of unpredictable, violent and often powerful external forces, means that millions of Syrians have been forced into the fragile position of becoming displaced and stateless with no place of refuge.





Ahmed Mater

Ahmed Mater born 1979, Tabouk, grew up in Abha, the capital of the mountainous Aseer region in the remote South West of Saudi Arabia. While studying medicine in Abha, he became a founding member of the influential of Al Miftaha Arts Village, and remains rooted to his Aseeri identity. In 2006, he co-founded Edge of Arabia and recently established Ibn Aseer (son of Aseer), a collective for young local artists. Mater's work has been widely shown in the Middle East and in Europe and in the collection of the British Museum and Los Angeles County Museum of Art. His work, which encompasses photography, calligraphy, painting, installation and video, explores the narratives and aesthetics of Islamic culture in an era of globalisation, consumerism and dramatic flux. Booth-Clibborn Editions internationally published a monograph on Ahmed Mater's life and work in 2010.



*Yellow Cow Performance*

Pigment print  
140 x 210 cm



**IDEOLOGICALLY FREE PRODUCT**

Yellow Cow Cheese (Red)

2010  
Silk-screen print  
144 x 115.5 cm

Ahmed Mater's Yellow Cow is a multi-year series of interventions, performances and installations that began in 2007 and is inspired by the longest Surah in the Quran, Surat Al Baqara (the Cow). The yellow cow is known to Muslims (and to Jews and Christians as the Golden Calf) as a symbol of idolatry: "Surely she is a yellow cow; her color is intensely yellow, giving delight to the beholders," [Surat al-Baqara, Verse 69].

Throughout this body of work, the Yellow Cow becomes a consumer commodity in the marketplace, in this image from Yellow Cow Performance (2007), he imagines what the daily life of Moses' sacrificial cow would have been had it continued to live. Here, he went to a farm and using a saffron-based dye, coloured a white cow yellow and then left it to run free in the village. Yellow Cow in later iterations is transformed into consumer products, such as dairy products like milk and cheese, which are then displayed on supermarket shelves.

Yellow Cow does not seek a resolution, with many iterations to date this ongoing project places this ancient story into contemporary consumer society.

Excerpt from *Ahmed Mater*  
2010

Ahmed Mater is an artist and cultural activist who has instigated many projects in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere bringing together artists to create a critical discourse about art in the region as well as Arab society. Most recently at the Nuqat conference in Kuwait he gave a talk titled 'Art as a Catalyst for Social Progress' which highlighted how artists can negotiate all the complexities of living and working in the Gulf by using the tools of humor, irony and visual impact. He said "We are also part of a wider network of activists within our own society, both within the system, outside of it and internationally. It is more interesting to be an artist surrounded by challenges like ours than to be an artist surrounded by too much choice and unrestricted opportunity."



Stills from *Art as a Catalyst for Social Progress* presentation





## Hasan Hujairi

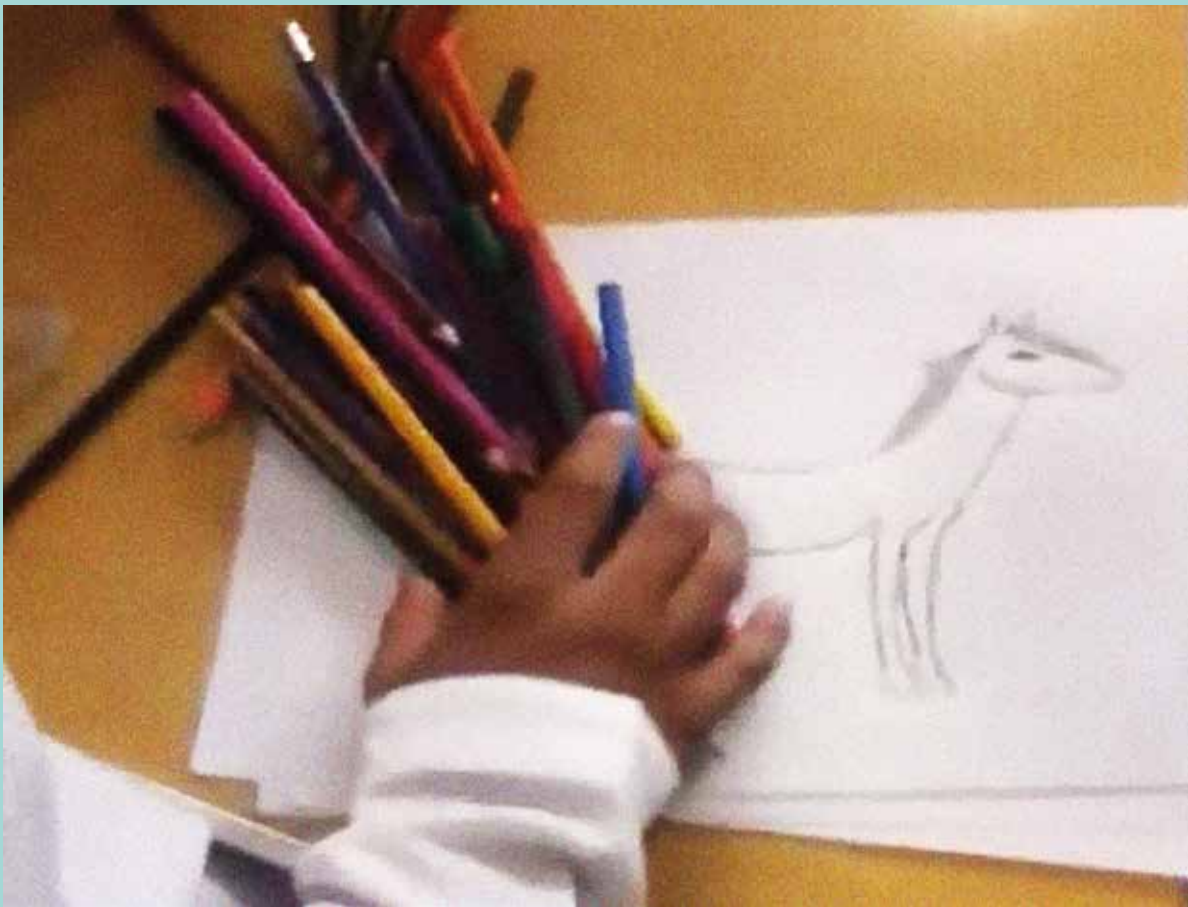
*10,000 Simple Steps to Perfectly Draw an Arabian Horse*  
2014

Arabian horses are beautiful. Everyone knows that if you can draw an Arabian horse then you are a true artist. It is very easy to draw an Arabian horse using a pencil and some colours. Listen closely to these simple instructions and you too will be among the elite artists of the world. Imagine how popular you could become if you can draw an Arabian horse without even seeing one in front of you.

Hasan Hujairi

Horses have appeared in works of art throughout history. In the Gulf, Arabian horses are the subjects of thousands of paintings, photographs and sculptures, and are the most popular subjects for artists alongside landscapes and portraits of dignitaries. In this installation, Hujairi comments on the demands of an artist in the Gulf today as well as the methodologies of art education. As you sit at a desk, written instructions and tools for drawing are offered to you, you are instructed to press play and the headphones begin to play a composition by Hujairi. We hear the voice of a young boy instructing us with a step-by-step guide to drawing a horse, combined with sounds of a Korean stringed instrument, the Yangeum that Hujairi is learning as part of his studies in Seoul.

Hasan Hujairi is a composer, sound artist, and independent researcher who divides his time between his native Bahrain and Seoul, South Korea. His sound art performances and installations build on his academic interest in Historiography and Ethnomusicology. Hujairi's academic background includes a BSBA in Finance from Drake University (Iowa, USA), a Masters in Economic History from Hitotsubashi University (Tokyo, Japan), and Ethnomusicology research at the University of Exeter (Exeter, UK). He has been a curator at Al-Riwaq Art Space (Adliya, Bahrain) and has been involved in other independent art initiatives in Bahrain. Hujairi is currently pursuing his doctorate studies in Korean Traditional Music Composition at Seoul National University's College of Music. He is also an accomplished oud player.



# EOA.P

EOA.Projects was established in 2009 as a gallery platform for artists working between the Middle East, Europe and United States. Under the vision of Stephen Stapleton, founder of Edge of Arabia and The Crossway Foundation, EOA.Projects collaborates with artists in building their careers and realising their potential to an international standard. Through production studios in London and Jeddah, EOA.Projects supports artists in developing new projects including limited edition fine art prints and special commissions. In 2012, EOA.Projects opened a 400m<sup>2</sup> gallery in South-West London with a curated programme of exhibitions, film-screenings and talks aimed at international audiences.

The publication was produced on the occasion of the exhibition *Never Never Land* at EOA.PROJECTS. 29 Nov 2014 - 31 Jan 2015

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EOA.PROJECTS  
40 ELCHO STREET  
LONDON SW11 4AU

FACEBOOK: EOA.PROJECTS  
TWITTER: @EOAPROJECTS  
INSTAGRAM: EOAPROJECTS

WEBSITE: [WWW.EOAPROJECTS.COM](http://WWW.EOAPROJECTS.COM)



[WWW.EOAPROJECTS.COM](http://WWW.EOAPROJECTS.COM)

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