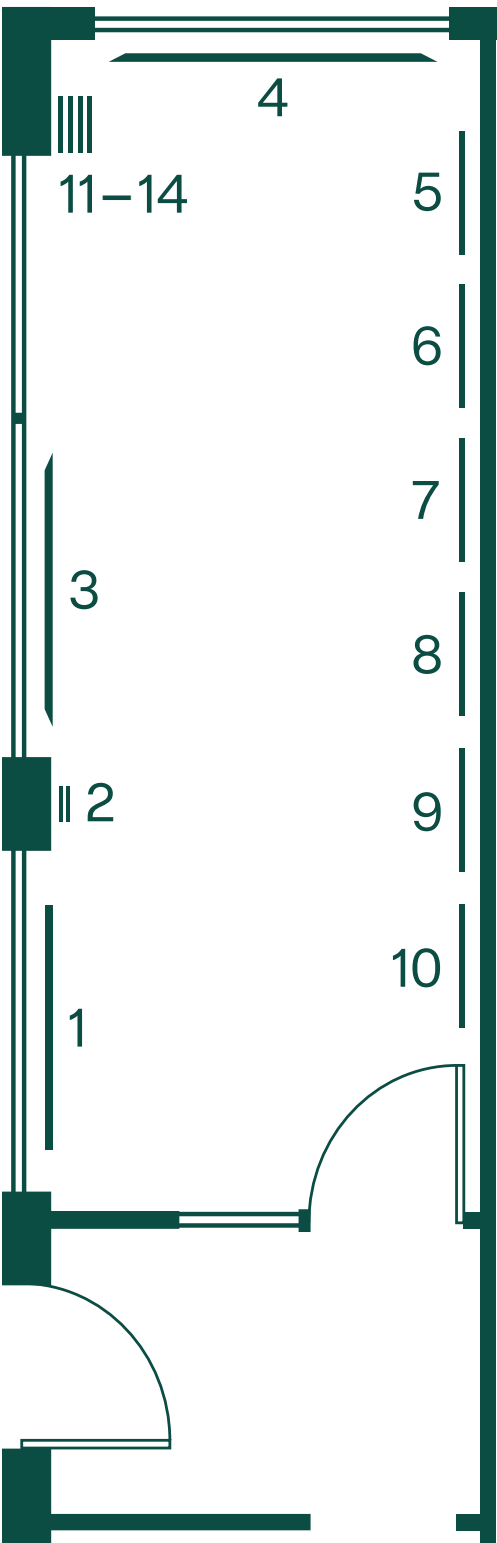


TO A

RETURNING
CLOUD

INAS

HALABI



1. *Hopscotch (the Centre of the Sun's Radiance)*
B1 (70x100cm) poster silkscreened on Chromolux
Metallic Gold paper, (scan the QR Code to listen), 2022
2. *Hopscotch (the Centre of the Sun's Radiance)*
Leaflets, 5.5 x 5.5 in. folded paper inkjet print, 2022
3. *Hopscotch (the Centre of the Sun's Radiance)*
Video installation, 120 min looped, 2021
4. *We Have Always Known the Wind's Direction*
Video installation, 11:57 min, 2019-2020

We Have Always Known the Wind's Direction
70 x 50 cm red filter[^] photographs, framed, 2024

5. **Image 1** Location: Hebron
Number of Red Filters: 3
Level of Cesium 137: 7.9 Bq
6. **Image 2** Location: al Tuwaneh
Number of Red Filters: 4
Level of Cesium 137: 11 Bq
7. **Image 3** Location: al Tuwaneh
Number of Red Filters: 4
Level of Cesium 137: 11 Bq
8. **Image 4** Location: Yatta
Number of Red Filters: 4
Level of Cesium 137: 9.9 Bq
9. **Image 5** Location: Khirbet al Taybeh
Number of Red Filters: 3
Level of Cesium 137: 7.9 Bq
10. **Image 6** Location: Khirbet al Taybeh
Number of Red Filters: 10
Level of Cesium 137: 30.2 Bq

Lions Warn of Futures Present (2017) Booklets

11. *Trucks Remind me of Burials*
9 x 12 cm, English / Arabic
12. *The Belgian Journalists*
9 x 12 cm, English / Arabic
13. *Near the Cave Lies a Peach Orchard*
9 x 12 cm, English / Arabic
14. *Who Will Dig Into this Landscape*
9 x 13 cm, English / Arabic

[^] The numbers of red plastic sheets used while capturing each image, corresponds to the level of radiation in each area. The project follows research by Dr. Khalil Thabayneh, a local nuclear physicist who previously visited areas in the south of the West Bank to look into the presence of Cesium- 137.

The earliest works in *To a Returning Cloud* are the four small publications comprising *Lions Warn of Futures Present* (2017). Following upon Halabi's research collecting stories and testimonies related to the burial of nuclear waste, rumored to be sealed in caves and underneath layers of cement, in the South of the West Bank, these texts grapple with the obscure forms of knowledge that pertain to secrets, the hidden, and the denied. They seem animated by a central tension where, on the one hand, they pursue questions of how to account for absence (how to render the invisible within the visual field, for instance), while on the other taking very seriously the complex dialectic of appearance and non-appearance, wherein burial is not contingent— the buried (or, more precisely, burial in general) is not something which could also be brought to light, but rather a structural dimension of the field of knowledge itself. They inhabit an ambiguous space between dispersal as an attribute of the means versus the object of knowledge: Is this dispersal a matter of ontology or representation? Are burial and obfuscation barriers which impede and fragment knowledge of a centered and singular cause or is it the centering and singularizing which bury the cause behind a more dispersed and decentered set of effects?

It is out of this productive ambiguity that the burial of nuclear waste comes to function as a synecdoche, a hinge at once a particular episode of violence and a mechanism of representation for broader systems of power and control.

A key dimension of these works—as well as the video and the series of red filter photographs which follow upon them (*We Have Always Known the Wind's Direction*)—stems from Halabi's engagement with the work of Dr. Khalil Thabayneh, a nuclear physicist who has conducted research on radiation (Cesium-137¹) levels around the Hebron District. Introducing an alternate matrix for the representation of the unseen (scientific procedures of measurement), Halabi develops the question of how to capture radiation on film through the use of red filters, varying the number of filters used to correspond to the amount of radiation measured in each location.

A critical question across a number of works, but perhaps most poignant in the video component of *We Have Always Known the Wind's Direction* is how we should understand the relationship between land and sky in terms of questions of freedom—in particular, freedom of movement. Is freedom of movement in the sky mobilized as a counterpoint to lack of freedom

¹ Some types of radioactivity can be found in nature, but others are created by humans. Cesium-137 (Cs-137) is a man-made source of radiation created inside a nuclear reactor or released from a nuclear explosion through nuclear testing. It moves easily through air, dissolves easily in water, and bonds strongly to soil and concrete. It can also be stored in the flesh of fish and animals. Exposure to radiation can lead to serious diseases including various types of cancer, deformities, and even death. Cesium-137 has no color, odor, or taste. Its level in the natural environment should be zero. Contaminated areas can make entire regions uninhabitable, akin to the disasters of Chernobyl and Fukushima.

of movement on land? Or does the extension of militarization and control into the sky, as well as on land, limit the viability of the sky as a counter-space of freedom (even in metaphorical terms)? At times, as in the long shot of the bird in *We Have Always Known the Wind's Direction*, there is a suggestion of the former. Similarly in the poem from which the exhibition title is drawn ("When heaven mourns for her mother, I return heaven to her mother. And I cry so that a returning cloud might carry my tears."), movement in the sky stands in for movement that is not possible on land, with the cloud going where the poem's subject cannot. And yet these moments are so deeply mournful and saturated with loss that a simple identification with unrestricted freedom seems inadequate. (Paradoxically, it is in this mourning that Halabi identifies a path of return—perhaps bound through the tethers of memory, perhaps because loss, unlike forgetting, is still a form of connection.)

In tension with any notion of contrast between land and sky, and perhaps more strongly articulated, is the aspect of totalization of control—the title *We Have Always Known the Wind's Direction* (stemming from a story Halabi heard about how nuclear testing sites are selected according to the direction of the wind) itself speaks to the manner in

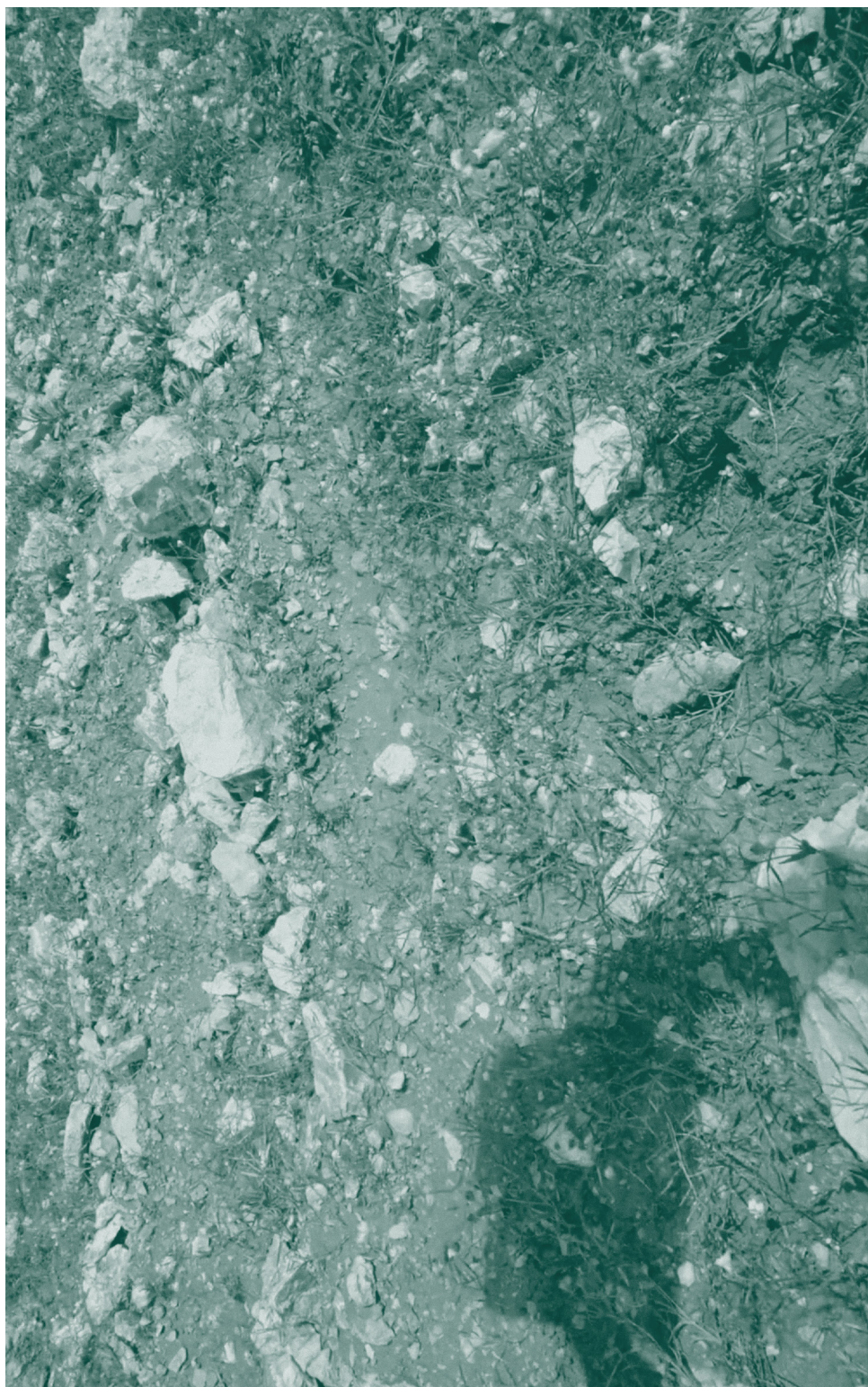
which the wind, air, and sky are, like the land, objects of control and surveillance.

Hopscotch (the Centre of the Sun's Radiance) (2021-2022) continues Halabi's concern with the nuclear but this time shifts to the material dimension of uranium extraction and the attending forms of labor and infrastructure.

Through field recordings, oral histories, and radio broadcasts captured near the Shinkolobwe uranium mine in the Democratic Republic of Congo and a former UMHK (Union Minière du Haut-Katanga)-owned uranium refinery in Olen, Belgium, *Hopscotch* explores residues and remainders of colonial violence as well as its persistence in concealed and often euphemized forms. Borrowing the title of Julio Cortázar's eponymous novel which can be read according to different sequences or "hopscotched" following a table of instructions, *Hopscotch* works to disrupt the linearity typical of both traditional historical and train-based narratives. But, in this disruption, fragmentation works equally to illuminate alternate connections and other histories which might elude more continuous forms of narration, prompting reflection on the afterlife of the colonial past in the present as much as the mutual imbrication of the disparate geographies of Europe and Africa. The second part of *Hopscotch's* title is drawn

An aerial photograph of a coastal town, likely in the Mediterranean region, showing a large stadium and a large stadium. The town is built on a hillside overlooking the sea. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent teal color. The word "SEE?" is written in white, bold, uppercase letters, rotated 90 degrees counter-clockwise, in the lower right quadrant of the image.

SEE?



from a passage of Patrice Lumumba's 1960 Congolese Independence Speech: "...we are going to make of the Congo the centre of the sun's radiance for all of Africa. We are going to keep watch over the lands of our country so that they truly profit her children". Halabi has reflected on this never-actualized call for the nationalization of the Congo's resources (notably its mines) to stress that, even after 1960, lacking economic independence, the Congo remained subject to the colonial violence of the Belgians who continued to reap the profits of mines such as Shinkolobwe.

The train is central to *Hopscotch*. The key physical infrastructure (along with the ship) of uranium transportation from the Congo to Belgium, it is also critical for its role in the standardization and synchronization of time, facilitating the production of a society and labor force running to the rhythms of capital. Originally commissioned by the Europalia Arts Festival (Trains & Tracks)—a presentation of works meditating on themes of the train and designed to be discovered in stations and on trains throughout Belgium and neighboring countries—*Hopscotch* was made to be experienced in transit, accessible through QR codes on posters in three train stations as well as on the multi-panel leaflet which accompanies the work. While *Hopscotch*, crucially,

provides almost no images, Halabi indicates that it should be understood as a work of film, with the window of the train or the gallery providing a screen onto the viewer's own landscape.

Vehicles (the train, but, even more so the car) feature heavily across Halabi's work as optical devices for moving through, viewing, and documenting landscape. On the one hand offering a kind of ambulatory and expansive vision akin to panorama, they figure equally as frames which suffocate and confine. The window, in particular, may serve as another type of screen, but, alternately, as a doubling of the lens, overlaying it and prompting reflection on vision—what is visible and what remains hidden—and a reminder that vision is always limited.

Existing across all the works of *To a Returning Cloud*, Halabi's work with nuclear themes extends back to *Lions Warn of Futures to Come* (2016), a project exploring nuclear power as an infrastructure of advanced capitalism and looking, in particular, at the burial of nuclear plant waste near a reactor in Switzerland, where Halabi completed a residency. Her research into the implications of radiation have included investigations of the 1986 Chernobyl and 2011 Fukushima nuclear disasters, and ultimately led into her deep

engagement with *fûkeiron* (the theory of landscape), which examines how power networks disrupt landscapes both visibly and invisibly.

Absolutely central to Halabi's practice, the discourse of *fûkeiron* belongs to a counter-strain of 1960s left filmmaking in Japan which, as Yuriko Furuhata has described, aimed its critique at forms of radical documentary filmmaking which "privilege[d] dramatic moments of rupture and change" and worked, rather, with the "everyday temporality of eventless landscapes". Furthermore, Furuhata argues that, "the increasing interest in the semiotic functions of quotidian landscapes in Japanese cinema mark[ed] a crucial transition from a centralized subjectivist mode of thinking about resistance—which is anchored in the revolutionary acts of human agents—to a de-centralized mode of investigating immanent relations of power that are found within a historically specific social formation."² As Halabi herself has described, "This type of violence functions at the micro level and includes governmental control over urban space."³

In Halabi's work, this approach is critical for a number of reasons. First, it provides a response to the question of what forms of representation might be adequate to capture non-punctual

³ Inas Halabi, *Tracing the Invisible: Slow Violence, Fûkeiron, and the Right of Return*

² Yuriko Furuhata, "Returning to actuality: fûkeiron and the landscape film," *Screen* 48:3 (Autumn 2007).

violence—violence which, insofar as it does not occur in singular events and enacts its effects in a way that is bound up with repetition, is resistant to traditional narrative structure. Second, it presents an alternate model to the spectacular images of violence which appear in the media—images which risk transforming violence into an object of consumption. And, finally, Halabi has stressed that what *fûkeiron* does, above all, is urge us to politicize the landscape— opening up a space to understand how violence manifests itself in the everyday.

Inas Halabi

(b. 1988, Palestine) is an Artist/Filmmaker. Her practice is concerned with how social and political forms of power are manifested and the impact that overlooked or suppressed histories have on contemporary life. Recent exhibitions and screenings include Luleå Biennial (2024), Hot Docs Canadian International Documentary Festival (2023), de Appel Amsterdam (solo 2023), Showroom London (solo 2022), Europalia Festival, Brussels (2021), Silent Green Betonhalle, Berlin (2021); Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (2020); and Film at Lincoln Center, USA (2020). Her recent work has been supported by Amarte, Amsterdam Fonds Voor de Kunst (AFK), Mondriaan Fund, and Sharjah Art Foundation. She lives and works between Palestine and the Netherlands.

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