

Field Meeting Take 6: Thinking Collections

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Ocula Insight

Stephanie Bailey 1 February 2019



Bassem Saad and Edwin Nasr, *This ritual I wish you could see (Render and file)* (2018) (still). HD video. Courtesy the artists.

Asia Contemporary Art Week's annual forum, Field Meeting, was staged outside of New York for the first time in 2019, with Take 6: Thinking Collections hosted by Alserkal Avenue in Dubai, concurrent to Quoz Arts Fest (25–26 January 2019). The two-day forum unfolded inside Concrete, Alserkal's impressive OMA-designed space, with pop-up exhibitions presented in warehouses 46 and 47, and performances staged in warehouse 58. The event, described by curator and ACAW Director Leeza Ahmady as a 'studio visit on a communal scale', sought to decategorise 'the word "collections" away from the ever-burgeoning global art market to claim the artist as the first collector.' A decategorisation that was perfectly enacted when artist

Arahmaiani Feisal concluded Field Meeting Take 6 with a performance of 'Breaking Words', which saw audience members write key words onto white plates, and Feisal smashing them onto a wall.

Ocula's editor-in-chief, Stephanie Bailey, was invited to deliver the closing remarks to the event, which involved Bailey constructing a report and a summary in real-time during the two-day gathering. Below is a copy of her remarks, with some edits and additions.



Arahmaiani Feisal performing 'Breaking Words' at FIELD MEETING Take 6: *Thinking Collections*, Alserkal Avenue, Dubai (25–26 January 2019). Courtesy Asia Contemporary Art Week.

So here we are, and here I am, tasked with the daunting challenge to deliver final remarks after a dense, thought-filled two days. Thanks to Leeza Ahmady, Alserkal Avenue, and all presenters, respondents, and pop-up artists for contributing to this gathering—and of course, to the audience who have stayed the course.

En route to Dubai, I thought about [Hassan Sharif](#), a pioneer of the U.A.E. art world, when thinking about how I might possibly capture the conversations expressed in this room, which had me writing up to the moment it was time to come on stage. Sharif once said, 'My whole body moves so that I am always facing the future, whatever it may hold'—a perspective that fits with the open-ended way 'collections'

have been thought through in this meeting, driven by an understanding of collecting as a way-finding practice, whether as an artist, writer, curator, administrator, or editor.



Exhibition view: Hassan Sharif, *Images*, Gallery Isabelle van den Eynde, Dubai (5 March–7 May 2015). © Estate of Hassan Sharif. Courtesy Gallery Isabelle van den Eynde.

Sharif was a quintessential artist-collector. On an exhibition he staged here at Alserkal Avenue in 2015, which included a giant column of magazine pages strung together from the ceiling to the floor, he talked about images and their ability to stimulate people in a consumerist society, wondering if this had always been their function. He pointed to the shopping mall as an example—'an important social vehicle in the U.A.E.', where 'everything ... is there to stimulate us.' He called this a horizontal, postmodernist existence, using the mangrove to diagram his point: 'Mangroves', he said, 'grow laterally as much as vertically, their branches dipping into the ground and initiating new roots.'

This came to mind when listening to Alserkal Avenue Director Vilma Jurkute's opening remarks to this forum, which she hoped might 'produce, or perhaps redefine or renegotiate, the new borders of knowledge geography and not just geography itself.'